

INSPECTION REPORT

CHICHESTER HIGH SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Chichester

LEA area: West Sussex

Unique reference number: 126063

Headteacher: Mrs L Parkin

Reporting inspector: R Peter J McGregor
3525

Dates of inspection: 15 – 19 May 2000

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11 to 19
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	Kingsham Road Chichester West Sussex
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Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Celia O'Shea
Date of previous inspection:	March 1994

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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			How well are pupils taught?
Viv Phillips	Lay inspector		How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
			Community links
Sylvia McConville	Team inspector	English	
		English as an additional language	
Barry Juxon	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Michael Newman	Team inspector	Science	
Raye Allison Smith	Team inspector	Art	
Paul Morgan	Team inspector	Design and technology	
Stuart Jordan	Team inspector	Geography	
		History	
George Rayner	Team inspector	Information technology	
Ros Fox	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
		Equal opportunities	
Robin Coulthard	Team inspector	Music	How well is the school led and managed?
		Religious education	
Maureen Bean	Team inspector	Physical education	How well does the school care for its pupils?
Bill Keast	Team inspector	Special educational needs	
Bill Stoneham	Team inspector	Sixth Form	
Jill Judson	Team inspector	Drama	

The inspection contractor was:

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The Registrar, Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House, 33 Kingsway, London WC2B 6SE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Chichester High School for Girls is a county high school for girls aged 11-19, with 1480 on roll. It is based on two sites separated by a ten-minute walk. Years 7 to 10 are at the main school and Years 11 to 13 at the second building, which is shared with a local education authority professional development centre. Some pupils move between the sites to make use of specialist accommodation. Year 12 and 13 girls are part of a joint sixth form, sharing some teaching and resources with Chichester High School for Boys. The school is much bigger than most secondary schools. An increasing proportion of the pupils at Chichester speak English as an additional language, currently almost 2%, but an extremely small number are at the early stages of learning English. 209 pupils are on the school's register of special educational needs, 177 of whom are at the lower stages 1 and 2. The proportion of pupils with special educational needs is below average for a school of this size, as is the number with Statements. 7.5% of pupils are eligible for free school meals, below the national average of 18%. Judgements made in this report may refer to similar schools: these are schools where between 5% and 9% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. Girls of a full range of ability choose to attend the school. Entry standards, as indicated by tests taken early in Year 7, fluctuate significantly from year to year but have been average or above average for many years. The area from which many of the girls come is socially and economically advantaged.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an effective school where high attaining girls do particularly well as they progress through the school. Teachers have good, often very good, subject knowledge which they use to good effect to help well-motivated girls to learn. Leadership and management are successful in promoting initiatives and sustaining high academic standards, but less so in resolving instances of misbehaviour and dissatisfaction; management structures and communication are too informal. Although the cost per pupil is a little above average, girls' regular attendance, the good behaviour and achievement of most, and the good quality of teaching, indicate that the school provides good value for money.

During the period of the inspection girls in Year 11 had started their GCSEs and Year 13s were in their final week of revision before taking A-levels. The work of these girls was not, therefore, available for scrutiny. The standards they had achieved and the quality of teaching and learning were not inspected. The inspection team focused on the provision made for the girls in Years 7 to 10 and in Year 12, and what they achieved.

What the school does well

- Well above average standards at the end of Year 9 and at A-level; above average at GCSE
- Very good achievement in GCSE dance and information technology and in many A-level subjects
- Very good teaching of high attaining pupils and in the sixth form
- Very good, sometimes excellent, attitudes to learning, and very good behaviour of most girls
- A very good range of subjects available and a developing strength in the use of computers
- Very helpful and successful transition from primary to secondary school; very useful guidance on transfer at age 16 and again at 18, with excellent careers education

What could be improved

- Inconsistent and informal monitoring and review processes resulting in teaching and learning problems not being identified and solved
- Problems of communication both within the school, particularly between senior managers and faculties, and with parents
- A small disruptive minority, often in lower sets, who unfairly restrict the learning of other girls
- Requirements not fully met for Key Stage 4 design and technology and physical education, nor for a daily act of collective worship; religious education not provided for all sixth formers
- Too few planned opportunities for enrichment in the sixth form curriculum outside the good range of academic courses on offer

The school's significant strengths outweigh its weaknesses. The weaknesses identified will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the last inspection six years ago, the school has maintained most of its significant strengths and further improved in several areas. The trend of improvement in Key Stage 3 test scores has been above the national picture, good GCSE results have been maintained and the standards achieved in the sixth form have improved to a high level. Low standards in information technology have been resolved. The physical education department has made good progress but a shortfall in curriculum time remains a problem. The enthusiastic and hard working attitude of many girls is still a strength. The systems of internal review referred to in 1994 have developed too slowly and this is an area of weakness. Strengths in teaching have been maintained with good effects on pupils' learning. Teaching is now more 'polarised' however, with greater strengths, but also some weaknesses. High quality relationships with most girls have been maintained, girls' academic achievements are effectively monitored but problems of behaviour management have emerged which restrict achievement for lower attaining pupils. Development planning is good, but lines of communication are still not as good as they should be. Overall, improvements outweigh problems, but not all the key issues identified in the last report are yet satisfactorily dealt with. Sound improvement has been made since the last report.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average total point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	C	C	A	

Key

well above average A

above average B

average C

below average D

well below average E

In this report, the term 'standards' refers to pupils' attainment relative to some clear national benchmark, such as National Curriculum levels, or descriptions, at the end of a Key Stage. 'Above average' standards, for example, means that a higher proportion of pupils of a particular age are succeeding at or beyond the level set than in the majority of schools. 'Achievement' on the other hand, reflects the accomplishments of pupils in relation to what you would expect of these particular pupils. The pupils' prior attainment, what they can already do, is the reference point for pupils' achievement.

In comparison with all schools nationally, attainment in national tests at the end of Year 9 was well above average in 1999 in English, mathematics and science. Compared with similar schools, standards were above the national picture in mathematics and well above in English and science.

Girls' GCSE grades were above national averages in 1999. 57% of the pupils gained 5 A*-C grades; the national figure was 46%. Compared with similar schools, results were broadly in line at 5 A*-C, below average at 5 A*-G and above average at 1 A*-G. English, mathematics and science results were above the national average. The well above average total points score has remained broadly the same for some years, whereas nationally the score has risen steadily. Girls achieved better in relation to their other subjects in dance, drama, information technology, art, and design and technology, but comparatively lower in physical education, history, French, Spanish and business studies.

A-level and sixth form vocational course results in 1999 were well above national figures. The 'average A-level pupil' nationally achieved C,C,C; an average girl at Chichester High achieved B,B,C or B,C,C. 60% of the grades were at A and B whereas nationally the proportion is 35%. The best A-level results were in art, biology, business studies, chemistry, economics, English literature, French, history, media studies, physics, psychology, religious studies and sociology, where high numbers of A and B grades were achieved. In no subjects were results unsatisfactory and there were few failures – the pass rate was over 96%; the national figure is 89%. Standards in GNVQ Advanced vocational courses and a BTEC national certificate course were significantly above national figures.

The school's target of 67% for the proportion of girls achieving 5 A*-C GCSE grades in 2000 is appropriate and achievable. The target average total points score of 45 is too low and very likely to be exceeded by the school in 2000.

Current standards overall in Years 9, 10 and 12 are above expectations and girls are making good progress. High attainers, those who work hard and those in teaching groups where expectations are high, all achieve well. There is underachievement by those who do not want to work and by those in lower sets whose work is interrupted by others. Variation in achievement is much less noticeable between subjects than it is between girls of different abilities and motivation.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good in the sixth form and good overall. Most girls are very positive, a few are not.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good around the school. In lessons, often good or very good. A small minority, often in lower sets, disrupt learning through poor behaviour
Personal development and relationships	Good development overall. Very good relationships throughout the school; generally girls have high self-esteem
Attendance	Satisfactory, with below average unauthorised absence. Punctuality is satisfactory overall, but adversely affected by the split site and no movement time between lessons.

The extremely positive attitudes towards work of most girls are a great strength of the school and a key contributory cause of the girls' academic achievements, particularly for high attainers and sixth formers. Some lateness to lessons was unavoidable; in a few instances, however, insufficient effort was made by staff and pupils to be punctual.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	Good	Satisfactory	Very good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Overall, the quality of the teaching observed was good. 96% of observed lessons were satisfactory or better, 32% were very good or excellent, and 4% were unsatisfactory. Effective teaching is a major factor in the good GCSE and very good sixth form results.

The greatest strengths are in teachers' subject knowledge and understanding. Many teachers' obvious enthusiasm for their subject motivates girls to succeed. Planning for individual lessons was good and academic expectations were high. Girls were questioned very effectively in a pleasant, helpful manner. The girls' responses were sometimes challenging for the teachers and on these occasions learning was excellent. Homework is set regularly, and is seen to be a key element of learning. Teachers work to achieve good relationships with the girls in their classes and these efforts result in co-operation and concentration from many.

The few weaknesses in teaching usually resulted from inability to manage the behaviour of a small minority of pupils; the outcome was unsatisfactory learning for those individuals and the rest of the group. In one or two lessons, teachers did not match the work well to the prior knowledge and understanding of lower attainers.

Literacy skills are effectively taught in all subjects. The use of correct technical language is emphasised and the girls have opportunities to make oral presentations; they use research skills and write well. The promotion of numeracy is sound; several departments teach important skills, but the approach is not consistent. Computers and other information and communication technology (ICT) are used effectively in a range of subjects and the girls appreciate their worth.

The quality of teaching was good in English and science; a high proportion was very good in science. Teaching was sound in mathematics, although about half that observed was good. The best teaching of these core subjects overall was in Years 7 to 9 and the sixth form. The highest quality teaching was in religious education, where it was very good. Teaching of modern foreign languages and history was sound although some teachers' skills in motivating pupils in these subjects were insufficiently effective, particularly for lower attainers. All other subjects were taught well, with the best teaching and the best learning in the sixth form.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Broad, balanced and relevant at Key Stage 3. Good subject range in Key Stage 4 and sixth form but unsatisfactory in that not all requirements are met.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Well taught when withdrawn to the special educational needs base, but too variable in subjects. Insufficient support staff
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Sound for the very small minority at an early stage of language development
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Good overall. The school promotes moral development very well and social and cultural development well. Spiritual development, although sound, is the weakest area.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good target setting and assessment data, but not consistently implemented and used in all departments. Good personal support and excellent careers guidance

Very good provision is made for personal, health and social education. A good range of extra-curricular activities is popular with many girls. Very good curricular and pastoral support for transition between key stages helps pupils to settle and maintain their rate of progress. In Key Stage 4, insufficient time is provided for physical education and not all pupils follow a design and technology subject. The requirement for religious education in the sixth form is not met, nor is there a daily act of collective worship for all. Too narrow a range of activities and insufficient planned responsibilities are offered to sixth formers.

Good monitoring procedures help maintain sound attendance. Heads of year and tutors work closely with parents for the benefit of pupils, although practice is inconsistent.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Strong and effective in achieving good standards for high attainers. Clear direction, implementing school aims. Weaknesses in communication and organisational structures. Unclear lines of accountability.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Sound. Appropriate committees. Well informed. Insufficiently active as 'critical friends' of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Informal and insufficiently systematic. New initiatives in 'paired teaching', but a lack of appraisal over several years. Some effective use of standards data to improve achievement
The strategic use of resources	Effective, good staff. Good use of accommodation on both sites. Good resources well used.

Difficulties of the split site are dealt with well, although uncertainties over the proposed new building and a move on to one site, already postponed, have inhibited developments and absorbed valuable management energy and time.

The school applies 'best value' principles, for example in providing courses suitable for the girls and embarking on initiatives such as the 'joint sixth'. Financial management is very effective with efficient value for money checks.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children make good progress • Staff have high expectations • Children like school • The school helps the pupils to become mature and sensible • The range of extra-curricular activities is good 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Homework comes in 'bunches', making it difficult for the girls to complete • Parents are not well informed about their children's progress • The school does not work sufficiently closely with parents. • Parents do not feel comfortable in asking questions of the school

The inspection team's findings support all the parents' positive comments and indicate that communication between senior managers and parents is not always as effective as it should be, with parents "kept at arm's length". Homework is occasionally 'bunched' but overall it provides girls with appropriate additional learning experience. The new 'subject surgery' system of consultation between parents and teachers does not result in effective communication of children's progress. Parents are well informed in writing on the progress their daughters are making towards set targets.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. In comparison with all schools nationally, the girls' **attainment at the end of Key Stage 3** was well above average in 1999. Between 70% and 80% of pupils gained level 5 or above in the three core subjects, English, mathematics and science. (Central government expectation is that pupils achieve level 5 or 6 at the end of Year 9). Their attainment was also well above average when compared with similar schools, that is schools where between 5% and 9% of the pupils are eligible for free school meals. Based on average total points figures (points are allocated to each pupil for the level she achieves, so this figure takes account of all pupils' attainment) English, mathematics and science results were well above national averages. When compared with similar schools, English and science were well above average and mathematics above average. Results at level 5 and above are less creditable than those at level 6 and above, indicating relative underachievement by lower attaining girls at the end of Year 9. Teacher assessments were generally accurate with a little underestimation in English and overestimation in science at level 5, when compared with test levels. Over the past four years, results have fluctuated in English, steadily improved in mathematics, and remained high in science. Compared with national averages for girls' schools over this four year period, English and science have been well above average and mathematics above average. Overall standards have been well above average and the trend of improvement in the average points score has been above the national trend.

2. In 1999 **GCSE examinations** the proportions of girls gaining 5 A*-C grades, 5 A*-G grades and 1 A*-G grade were above national averages. Based on the averages for the past three years, the proportion gaining 5 A*-C grades, although fluctuating, is well above the national average. 57% of the pupils gained 5 A*-C grades in 1999 where the national figure was 46%. When compared with similar schools, the picture is not as positive, with results broadly in line at 5 A*-C, below average at 5 A*-G and above average at 1 A*-G. The relatively low figure at 5 A*-G is a further indication of underachievement by some lower attaining pupils. When compared by average points scores, the schools' results are well above national averages and well above results for similar schools, reflecting the success of the girls in the large number of subjects taken. Many take nine full GCSEs and one 'half subject' as well. The girls' average points score has remained broadly the same – between 45 and 46 points - for some years, apart from a significant fall in 1997, whereas nationally over the past five years, the score has risen steadily from 37 to approaching 41 points. Compared subject by subject, the greatest successes in 1999 were in dance, drama, information technology, art, and design and technology, the least successful were physical education, history, French and Spanish and business studies. When the girls' Key Stage 3 results are considered, the GCSE results show good progress from those results.

3. **A-level and sixth form vocational course results** in 1999 were well above the national average, and significantly higher than in 1998 when results were similar to national averages. The numbers of candidates taking one, or two or more A-levels, were similar in both years. The average points score per pupil taking just one A-level is almost a grade higher than achieved nationally. For those pupils taking two or more A-levels, the national average points score of 17.9, corresponds to about C,C,C. The average girl at Chichester High in 1999, however, achieved the equivalent of B, B, C or B, C, C. 60% of the grades were at A and B whereas nationally the proportion is 35%. The best A-level results were in art, biology, business studies, chemistry, economics, English literature, French, history, media studies, physics, psychology, religious studies and sociology, where high numbers of A and B grades were achieved. In no subjects were results unsatisfactory and there were very few failures - the pass rate was over 96%; the national figure is 89%. A number of subjects, including art, chemistry, French, geography, history and religious studies all recorded 100% pass rates. Girls following GNVQ Advanced vocational courses also achieved standards significantly above national figures. All girls following a BTEC National certificate course passed, compared with a national pass rate of 81%.

4. The **GCSE target** of 67% for the proportion of girls achieving 5 A*-C grades, 1 % above the school's best ever results in 1998, is appropriate and achievable. The target average points score, at 45 points, is below the figure achieved for all but one of the last five years and is unrealistically low. It is very likely to be exceeded in 2000.

5. **Standards in Year 9, Year 10 and Year 12, currently**, are above average and girls are making good progress. Their learning is effective because teaching is good and the girls themselves have such positive attitudes to work. Their achievements were apparent in written work and in observed lessons. High attainers and those who want to work hard, or those who are in teaching groups where there are high expectations, all achieve well, and this is the vast majority of the girls at Chichester. There is some underachievement, however, by those who do not want to work and by those in lower sets whose work is interrupted by others. For the most part, variation in achievements in subjects is much less than this difference between achievements of girls of different abilities and motivation. School senior managers are aware of the issue, but procedures are not yet in place to resolve the problem.

6. **Literacy** standards across the curriculum are good. Most pupils acquire sufficiently well developed skills to feel confident in speaking, reading and writing in all subjects. The use of correct vocabulary is emphasised. The standard of presentation and quality of writing is generally high. The implementation of the school policy on literacy is seen as a key to improving learning and raising standards in all subjects. **Numeracy** standards are good and developed well in several subjects. Girls use formulae with confidence and use graphs to illustrate data and demonstrate relationships. Statistics are evaluated and interpreted.

7. Results in GCSE **English** in 1999 were in line with the national average for all maintained schools and similar schools, as they have been for the last three years, with a high proportion at the highest grades. GCSE English literature results have been above average for the same period. GCE A-level results in 1999 were well above average for maintained schools in both English literature and the combined literature and language examinations, with a high proportion of pupils gaining A grades.

8. Current attainment in English at the end of Year 9 is good, sound at the end of Year 10 and very good in the sixth form. Those pupils who enter the school with high levels of competence make good progress as they move through the key stages. Pupils with special educational needs and those of average to low attainment make less effective progress. Pupils in all stages speak with confidence and listen well. Their attainment in reading is good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in Year 12. Writing is good; pupils benefit from building and improving their work with careful planning and drafting, and much finished work is very well word-processed

9. GCSE results in **mathematics** in 1999 for A*-C grades were above the national average with an above average number of pupils obtaining A and A* grades. Results for A*-G grades were about average. Results were similar to those in 1998 and at the time of the last inspection. When compared to national averages, pupils' results in mathematics were slightly better than their results in other subjects. A-level results in 1999 were similar to national averages.

10. Current attainment in mathematics is above the national expectation at both Key Stages 3 and 4. By the end of Key Stage 3, almost all pupils have acquired basic number skills. Investigative skills are generally well developed. By the end of Year 10, higher attaining pupils reach standards which are well above average across all areas. In Year 12 A-level classes, most girls reach standards that are average or above average. They reach good standards in calculus and algebra, and solve trigonometrical equations.

11. At GCSE, all pupils study double **science** and standards in 1999 were above national averages. There are higher than average percentages at grades A*, A and B. One relative area of weakness is that the proportion of C grades is a little lower and D grades a little higher than might be expected, indicating some underachievement among middle ranking pupils. At A-level, numbers have fluctuated but the results in 1999 were well above national averages. In biology, chemistry and physics, the pass rate and the proportion of pupils with A and B grades were well above national averages.

12. Science attainment in Year 9 is well above expectations and achievements are good or very good. Standards in Year 10 books and science coursework were good for pupils of all abilities across the three subjects, physics, chemistry and biology. In the current Year 12, A-level numbers are smaller than in 1999 and standards meet, but do not exceed, national expectations. Girls were able to carry through independent investigations in physics and produce high good work in genetics. In chemistry, their knowledge enabled them to ask challenging questions.

13. Results in the 1999 GCSE and A-level **art** examinations are a strength of the school. The percentage of pupils gaining A*-C grades in GCSE was very high when compared with schools nationally and well above average for girls' schools. The results compare favourably with other subjects in the school. The work by pupils currently in Year 10 shows similar high levels of achievement. Attainment in the A and A/S level examinations was well above average. The work shows for example, a good understanding of analytical research and investigation. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is above expectation and most girls make good progress.

14. The 1999 GCSE examination results in **design and technology** show above average attainment at A*-C grades for girls taking graphic products and resistant materials. Results at grade A*-C in food and textiles are in line with national averages. The number of girls achieving the higher grades A* and A is well above national average in all areas. Results for all subjects at A*-G grades are in line with national averages. Standards currently, at the end of Key Stage 3 and Year 10, are above national expectations in all design and technology subjects. In both key stages, girls' design work is good and most are achieving well.

15. GCSE **geography** results were well above the national average. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades was above the national averages, though those attaining grades A* - G was marginally below the national figure. Results at A-level in 1999 were higher than the national average but lower than in the majority of other subjects in the school. Current attainment in Year 10 is above the expected level and girls' achievements are good. Pupils use subject vocabulary accurately and have an appreciation of environmental issues. Girls make satisfactory progress at Key Stage 3 and achievement in relation to prior learning is sound. The attainment of pupils currently in Year 9 is above national expectations. They have good spatial awareness and atlas skills. Attainment in Year 12 is above the level expected at this stage; girls have good skills in the analysis and interpretation of data.

16. There have been fluctuations in the standards of attainment in GCSE **history** examinations, but the overall trend in results is one of improvement. Results in 1999, however, were well below those of other subjects, though still higher than national averages. Results at A-level in 1999 were well above the national average with almost two-thirds of students achieving level A and B grades, and all achieving a grade in the range A-E. Attainment of current Year 9 pupils is above national expectations. Girls can explain historical points using appropriate terms and have a good understanding of chronology. Attainment in Year 10 is above the level expected and achievements are good. Attainment of the current Year 12s is well above the expected level. Girls are achieving very well. The girls can make balanced appraisals of the different interpretations of historical events.

17. Standards in GCSE **information technology** are very high compared with national figures. They have improved in each of the last three years. Pupils who did not take the GCSE course had the opportunity to use computers in other subjects and to gain a 'half GCSE' in information and communications technology. Standards in this at the highest grades were below national expectations but all who entered achieved a pass, which is better than the national picture. In lessons and work seen, standards were slightly better than national expectations. In Year 9, all pupils can use the facilities of word processors well. Most can combine text, charts and pictures, and use the Internet effectively. All are able to write and test simple control procedures. In Year 10, many pupils word-process their work in a wide range of subjects and some use scanners to incorporate their own pictures. Sixth form standards were also better than national expectations. Computers are used well throughout the curriculum and girls' achievements are sound or better.

18. Pupils' results in the 1999 **French** GCSE examinations were above national averages, but below the school average. The proportion of top grades was high, but so also was that of E grades and below. Over the past three years, results have declined. A-level results in 1999 were well above national averages. Current attainment is above national expectations by the end of Key Stage 3. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well. Attainment in Year 10 is in line with national expectations overall. Higher attaining pupils achieve well but some average and lower attaining pupils underachieve. Standards in Year 12 are high with pupils incorporating new language confidently into their work. GCSE results in **German** and **Spanish** were above national averages. Over the past three years, standards have remained constant in German and there has been a slight improvement in Spanish. The very small number of A-level candidates in German gained good grades and

standards in Spanish were similar to national averages. Currently at the end of Year 9, pupils attain standards that are in line with expectations for second language study after two years of learning either German or Spanish. Standards in the current Year 10 in both subjects are in line with national expectations. In Spanish and German, pupils achieve well for their abilities at both Key Stages 3 and 4. Year 12 A-level standards in German are as expected nationally.

19. Attainment in GCSE **music** has been very high. Almost all pupils achieved higher grades. At A-level results are in line with the school's expectations for the small numbers following the course. Results were very high in 1999, when all candidates achieved A to C grades. Current attainment at the end of Key stage 3 is above national expectations. By the end of Year 9 girls compose and perform with assurance in a variety of styles and they have a secure knowledge of the relevant musical theory; they achieve well. Attainment amongst the small number of pupils in Year 12 is well in line with each pupil's aptitude in all aspects of the course. Pupils' performing skills are good and they make good progress.

20. GCSE results in **physical education** were well below the national average and low compared with other results gained at the school. This was caused, in part, by staffing problems. Dance GCSE results in 1999 were well above the national average. In the sixth form, AS-level dance and A-level physical education results for the small numbers involved were in the lower grade range of C to E. The standards attained at the end of Year 9 are at the level expected nationally and achievement is sound. In some activities standards were good, for example rounders and shot put, but other skills were underdeveloped. In Year 10, pupils show above average knowledge and understanding in their physical education theory work but below average attainment in most activities. The raising of standards of attainment in Key Stage 4 is seriously hampered by a lack of timetabled time in Year 10. In the time available, however, achievement is often good or better. Current standards of attainment in theory work in Year 12 are above national expectations and in practical work of an average quality. There is no timetabled provision for physical education generally in the sixth form which means that pupils are not learning that exercise is important for a healthy lifestyle.

21. Pupils in Key Stage 4 take a GCSE 'short' course in **religious education**. Figures for national comparison are not available, but results were very high in 1999, when 83% gained A* to C grades. Results are good at A-level with all candidates gaining higher grades in 1999. Current attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the expectations of the local Agreed Syllabus. By the end of Year 9 all pupils have gained wide knowledge of the Christian faith and understand that different faiths offer different beliefs. Attainment in Year 10 and Year 12 is above average. Their achievements in all stages are good or very good.

22. In 1999, results in GCSE **drama** were well above the national average, as were A-level results. Attainment by the end of Key Stage 3 is similar to expectations, good at the end of Year 10, and very good in Year 12. Pupils at all levels of attainment achieve well, making progress as they move through the school.

23. Results in GCSE **media studies** in 1999 were high with over 80% achieving grades A*-C and also at A-level where all pupils achieved a grade A, B or C. The results have been consistently high for the last three years. Pupils' work showed thorough intellectual criticism and creative flair.

24. The Year 10 **vocational course** is new - Part 1 GNVQ foundation in health and social care - and no examination results are available; results in the sixth form vocational areas - GNVQ in health and social care, leisure and tourism, and a two-year BTEC National course in early childhood studies - are very good and completion rates are well above national expectations.

25. Standards in **other courses** such as A-level business, sociology and psychology are above or well above average. Present Year 12 A-level and vocational pupils are making good progress, achieving good standards. A major factor contributing to the high levels of attainment is the quality of teaching.

26. Most pupils whose standards of reading and spelling are well below those of pupils of a similar age make at least satisfactory progress resulting from the teaching they receive within the **special educational needs** department. Individual pupils make progress, as indicated by their movement to lower stages of identified need

or their removal from the register. However the department does not maintain a record which quantifies the overall progress achieved, nor are records kept of these girls progress in subject departments.

27. In most subjects in each key stage standards are higher than those reported six years ago.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

28. Most girls have a very positive **approach to learning**. In over half the lessons observed in Years 7 to 10 the girls' **attitudes and behaviour** were very good or excellent, and in Year 12 this proportion increased to over nine in every ten. Sixth formers' attitudes and behaviour were always good or better, often as a result of the quality of their relationships with teaching staff. In Years 7 to 10, where attitudes and behaviour were at least good in over three-quarters of lessons, girls persevered with their work and wanted to do well. These very positive approaches are a key contributory cause of the girls' academic success and remain a strength, as in the report six years ago

29. Almost all girls work well without supervision, maximising their opportunities. School sports and music clubs are popular and well attended. Sixth formers volunteer to assist in main school activities, such as the industry day for all of Year 9 which took place during the inspection, and show generally good levels of personal development. Social communication, however, is not as well developed as it could be in that the two sixth form year groups often do not relate positively to each other.

30. The **personal development** of the girls is good overall. An introduction to Islam for Year 8 girls captured their imagination. They became engrossed in the demanding work, and the quality of note taking reflected their intense and genuine interest in another culture. Islamic artefacts – a prayer mat and the Qur'an on its stand – engaged their intellectual curiosity. The teaching was excellent, but so were the behaviour and attitudes of the girls. Good humour, excellent eye contact amongst the girls and with the teacher ensured the highest levels of concentration throughout the fifty minute lesson. The girls in an A-level English literature lesson showed similar diligence and interest in their revision session discussing a set text. Their self-esteem and confidence enabled very high order debate and all girls worked hard for the full lesson. The girls were challenged, but they also challenged the teacher – to which there was an excellent response.

31. In Year 10, and to a lesser extent in Years 7 to 9, a small minority of girls, often those in lower sets, were disruptive and interrupted the work of their peers in lessons. Sometimes work was insufficiently well matched to pupils' needs, it was too easy or too difficult, and this caused a few girls to be silly. At other times teachers did not deal effectively with misbehaviour and so problems 'blew up'. Staff had good intentions but were unaware of any school systems that they could use to control problems. The impact of these girls is out of all proportion to their number. For example, in a lower set mathematics lesson in Year 10, a few girls were noisy and called out inappropriately throughout the lesson. The teacher was supported by two other adults but girls' behaviour and attitudes to work were poor. No direct rudeness occurred but little learning took place as chatter about holidays and similar social activity dominated.

32. Behaviour observed around school was very good. Girls arrived in the mornings in a good-humoured manner, got on well during mid-morning breaks and the lunchtime - with no instances of serious misbehaviour observed - and left calmly at the end of the day. The small dining area means that girls eat their lunch in a range of rooms in the main school and have access to the building. Their sensible conduct and respect for school property and buildings at such times indicates the high degree of maturity of many of them. Many pupils show good awareness of the ways in which their actions affect others. Discussions with girls indicated that most enjoy coming to school and they get on well together. The point was made, however, that a small minority make disparaging, unpleasant remarks at times. Over 200 questionnaires about the school were returned by parents and they indicated strongly that their children like school and that behaviour is generally good, although they did refer to problems in lower sets. In the past few years very few girls have been excluded temporarily or permanently, just three girls temporarily in the last academic year. The last report made reference to an orderly environment and good behaviour. This is equally true today, with the exception of the impact of a small minority of girls.

33. Pupils with **special educational needs** have good attitudes to learning when working with support staff in the base and in lessons. Most work co-operatively with their peers and successfully in their subject lessons. The behaviour of a few pupils with identified special educational needs is poor, however, and when this is uncontrolled the whole group's learning is adversely affected.

34. **Attendance** has been steady for a number of years and a little above national averages. The proportion of unauthorised absence is less than half the national figure. A few pupils are late in the morning, which is unhelpful for effective use of tutor periods and assembly time. Punctuality to lessons is usually satisfactory but, when staff and pupils have to move from one site to the other, curriculum time is lost – as much as ten to fifteen minutes from one or two lessons. Occasionally staff and girls were tardy in arriving at lessons. The lack of movement time between some lessons, and problems over transfer between sites, has resulted in casual attitudes to timekeeping. Issues of punctuality as a result of the split site were referred to in the last report.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

35. Overall, the **quality of the teaching** observed was good. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 was good; the quality was sound in Year 10, and very good in the sixth form. In Years 7 to 9 and Year 10 about two-thirds of lessons were good or better and in the sixth form almost all were of this quality. In the sixth form about half the observed lessons were very good or excellent, a very high proportion. In Year 10, however, about one in every ten observed lessons was unsatisfactory. A much lower proportion of problems was observed in Years 7 to 9 and none at all in the sixth form. The quality of the girls' learning reflects these teaching judgements. Good teaching, combined with the very good attitudes of most of the girls, results in the good standards achieved in the school at GCSE and the very good sixth form results.

36. The **greatest strengths** in teaching are in staff's subject knowledge and understanding and this was apparent in all subjects taught. Many staff are enthusiastic about their areas and this interest and enjoyment is apparent to the girls, particularly high attainers, who are then motivated to succeed. Planning for individual lessons was also good in virtually all areas and there were high academic expectations. In many lessons, the girls were questioned very effectively to ensure they understood previous work, but in a pleasant, helpful manner. The girls' responses were sometimes challenging for the teachers and on these occasions learning was excellent. Homework is regularly set, and usually in the middle of lessons, according to school policy, to ensure that homework is seen to be a key element of learning and not an 'afterthought' at the end of a session. Teachers work to achieve good relationships with the girls in their classes and these efforts result in co-operation and concentration from the majority.

37. The **few weaknesses** in teaching usually resulted from an inability to manage the behaviour of a minority of pupils, and the outcome was unsatisfactory or, very occasionally, poor learning. At times, one or two individual girls were unmanageable, yet school systems did not enable the staff concerned to deal appropriately with them. Teachers had to spend too much time dealing with misbehaviour rather than teaching. In one or two lessons, teachers did not match the work well to the prior knowledge and understanding of low attainers and this caused dissatisfaction and unruly behaviour. In these situations, work was set that used too complex technical language or involved concepts beyond the girls' understanding.

38. **Literacy** skills are effectively taught in all subjects. All departments are aware how fundamental these are to the girls' future success. The use of correct technical language is emphasised, for example, in science, design and technology and history. Many teachers involve the girls in speaking about what they have learnt, in response to questions and in presentations. Girls are expected to use research skills and, again in many subjects, the quality of presentation and of writing is considered important. The promotion of **numeracy**, although sound, is not as effective as for literacy. Several departments teach important skills, such as the use of statistics in geography, and in mathematics itself mental mathematics sessions are very useful. Teaching these skills is not yet managed across the school, although a working party has this in hand. The girls' **ICT skills** are developed through effective use of computers, and other information technology, in many subjects. Teachers are confident users of the technology themselves with the result that the girls appreciate its value and use it effectively. The use of ICT for teaching is a growing strength.

39. Good teaching was observed in many subjects, but the highest quality overall was in religious education where girls developed an extremely thorough understanding and knowledge as well as an interest in the work. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of education were promoted very effectively, as they were in English, history and geography. In an example of excellence in a Year 12 religious education lesson, the rapport and good humour were built upon very careful and thorough planning. The teacher's knowledge was used to very good effect to achieve the highest standards. An emphasis on critical methods and a compelling manner led to great concentration. The girls made suggestions about the significance of the miracles discussed and made valid points about differences between Luke's and Matthew's accounts. Their progress was excellent. Some lessons of a similar quality were observed in physical education.

40. The quality of teaching of English and science was good and it was sound in mathematics, nevertheless with some good aspects. In these three core subjects, homework was used very effectively and most pupils appreciated its importance. High expectations, good introductions and effective finishes gave a good structure to many lessons. The significant difference between the mathematics teaching and learning and that in English and science, was the extent to which the girls found the subject rather dull and difficult, even confusing at times in the younger classes. The best teaching of the core subjects was in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form. The many extra-curricular visits that take place in English are very helpful in extending the girls' learning, and this is also true in art.

41. In many subjects, teaching was good overall, and in most of these the pattern of relative success reflected the overall picture for the school, with the best work and the best learning in the sixth form. The pattern of art teaching was slightly different in that teaching and learning were very good in the sixth form, good in Key Stage 4 and sound in Key Stage 3. In Key Stage 3 art classes, direction and progress were less certain, without the structure of examination requirements. Teaching of modern foreign languages and history was sound although some teachers' skills in motivating pupils in these subjects were insufficiently effective, particularly for lower attainers. No overall judgement was made about the quality of teaching in a range of other courses because only a small number of lessons were observed. However, the quality that was observed was excellent in GCSE Latin and good or very good in A-level psychology and sociology. In business studies the quality was mixed, with some unsatisfactory aspects. Girls' attainment in post-16 courses was usually enhanced by a challenging approach.

42. Although a significant and increasing number of girls have English as an additional language, very few indeed are at the early stages of language acquisition. All these girls are effectively taught. Pupils with identified special needs are well taught when withdrawn to the special educational needs base. Here, teachers and support staff plan work which is well matched to the individual needs of each pupil which results in pupils learning, consolidating and developing their literacy and comprehension skills. Within the subjects of the curriculum the quality of teaching for pupils with special educational needs is too variable. Teaching is good where teachers take note of individual needs and plan work accordingly. This, together with the effective use of learning support staff, results in pupils learning well and making satisfactory progress. The organisational structure used by the school results in many pupils with special educational needs being in the lowest sets. Within these sets a minority of pupils show behavioural problems which affect the learning of the whole group, particularly when teachers do not have sufficient support or adequate strategies for managing pupil behaviour.

43. The proportion of sound or better teaching is higher than reported six years ago and many more good lessons were observed. Strengths in teachers' subject knowledge, high expectations, effective planning and homework, good relationships and thorough questioning, have been retained, and built upon in some departments, with good effect on pupils' learning. The outcomes of this are seen in the girls' GCSE and A-level achievements. Teaching is now more 'polarised' however, with greater strengths, but also some weaknesses. Problems in behaviour management are now an issue, leading to some underachievement by low attaining pupils. Overall sound progress has been made since 1994.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?

44. Curriculum provision is broad, balanced and relevant in **Key Stage 3** and is enhanced by drama, three foreign languages and Latin for the higher attaining pupils. Pupils receive very good guidance in Year 9 as they make their option choices. **In Key Stage 4** the breadth and relevance is enhanced by GNVQ courses in health and social care and business studies. At the end of Key Stage 4 pupils enter for GCSE, certificate of achievement and GNVQ accreditation.

45. In terms of academic subjects, the **sixth form curriculum** offered is a wide and varied one. Many different A-level subjects are available and this choice is enhanced by the arrangements for collaborative working that exist with the adjacent boys' school. Choice is further enhanced by the provision of some AS-level options in subjects such as medical ethics and art history, and by offering some vocational options. A GNVQ course in health and social care is available in Year 12 at intermediate level and a popular two-year BTEC National course in early childhood studies is followed by approximately 20% of the sixth formers. This course successfully provides students with an alternative route to employment and both further and higher education.

46. In other senses, the sixth form curriculum is rather narrow and limiting. Students are offered few opportunities for enrichment. Arrangements for regular assemblies are unsatisfactory, as are the arrangements for registration. On most days an informal system of registration exists and formal contact between students and their form tutors is minimal. The curriculum offers little opportunity for sport, the school is not meeting its legal obligations for providing religious education and, though there are general studies lessons, there is little planning for the delivery of an enrichment curriculum that encourages students to reflect on moral, cultural and spiritual issues. The good opportunities that do exist are based in department subject teaching, for example in art and English. Where students do not follow these subjects there is little alternative provision. Opportunities are limited for students to develop social responsibility. Students do raise money for various charitable ventures, a good number undertake community service through the 'OUTSET' programme organised by the county, some Year 12 students acted as hosts for the Year 9 Industry Day, and a few are involved in supporting main school tutor groups, but there is no overall planned provision. Though the academic provision is strong and offers much choice, the quality of the rest of the post-16 curriculum is much weaker.

47. Within the good subject curriculum provision there are weaknesses which mean that the school is not meeting its statutory requirements. In Key Stage 4, a minority of pupils do not have access to a design and technology course and there is insufficient time for all aspects of the syllabus to be covered in physical education. The planned curriculum for September 2000 has a substantial increase in time for physical education and should enable requirements for design and technology to be met. In the sixth form, there is inadequate provision for physical education and religious education. The school does not provide a daily act of collective worship for every pupil.

48. The provision made for **careers education and guidance** is excellent. The programme is detailed, very well planned, varied and operates in all years. Pupils in Year 7 experience aspects of careers education in their personal and social education lessons and excellent planned work takes place in all other years, culminating in Year 13, where the emphasis is placed on winning a place at university or securing a good job. Work experience is undertaken in both Years 10 and 12. Both programmes last for a week and school staff take responsibility for organising placements, with suitable emphasis being placed on health and safety concerns, including insurance. Another strength of the programme is an industry day held in Year 9. This is an inspirational event that allows all Year 9 pupils to work with staff from a wide variety of local companies. Pupils are set a series of challenges that are thoughtfully designed to foster the development of key skills and to show the importance of such skills in commerce and industry. Very good efforts have been made to introduce realistic simulations into subject teaching. Through the Challenge 21 initiative – a county-wide scheme - firms are encouraged to work in partnership with school departments. For example, modern language students have worked with a ferry operator and the school's science department has worked with a hotel chain on an energy saving project. The innovative and exciting approach taken towards careers education and guidance in the school is enhancing the education of all pupils and is helping them to make informed choices about their future careers.

49. A comprehensive **key skills** development plan guides and monitors what takes place across all three key stages. The good provision for personal, social and health education, including drugs education, is supported by a comprehensive scheme of work. Planning for this important aspect of the curriculum is very good.

50. The total **curriculum time** is in line with nationally recommended figures and time allocations are broadly in line with recommendations. Some girls arrive late to a number of lessons and some Year 10 girls leave lessons early to commute to the upper school site. Additionally, there are teachers who move sites between lessons with no time allocated for doing so. As a result, not all pupils receive the full allocation of curriculum time. Similarly, in Years 8 and 9, higher attaining girls who study Latin do not receive their full entitlement to drama and personal, social and vocational education.

51. Pupils are taught in broad **bands and in sets**. These work well in mathematics where the good setting arrangements assist effective class teaching and enhance the learning. Girls with specific learning needs such as dyslexia, however, commented that they sometimes felt wrongly placed in sets as a result of the assessment process. The lack of support assistants exacerbates this situation. Current arrangements do not ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils.

52. **Timetabling** is sound overall, but has a number of weaknesses. In several subjects, such as English, lower attaining pupils have many of their lessons in the afternoon and in Year 7 French, almost half of the lessons taught are at the end of the afternoon. Some classes are split between teachers as in Key Stage 3 English for example or Year 7 French where two thirds of the groups are taught by two teachers. The long double periods – 100 minutes – are also too long in several subjects for low attaining sets.

53. **Curriculum planning** is good in subjects such as mathematics, geography, history, design technology and drama in Key Stage 3. Schemes of work are detailed and helpful and are used to guide teaching and learning. Investigations in mathematics are particularly well planned. Planning is unsatisfactory in art in Key Stage 3 and in Key Stage 4 music.

54. **Extra-curricular** provision is good. There are many musical activities including several choirs and orchestras, a harp ensemble and a swing band and a comprehensive programme of games fixtures. A number of clubs such as the science, mathematics and history clubs, support in-class learning, as does the after school life drawing class in art and the very helpful 'homework clubs'. Support sessions are provided in many subjects, after school and at lunchtime, to help girls catch up with their work and to provide helpful revision time. Theatre visits and drama productions take place throughout the year. An extensive programme of residential visits includes a three day visit to a beach area for those studying geography in Years 10 and 11; a residential visit for the whole of Year 9 which forms part of the personal, social and vocational education course and a visit to 'Hardy Country' for A-level English students.

55. Relationships with other institutions are good with effective **links with feeder primary schools**. Girls commented very positively about the fact that the head of year knew all of their names on the day that they arrived at the school. Governors have a good understanding of curriculum issues and are eager to support and contribute to the work of the school. Their role, in terms of monitoring the curriculum, however, is underdeveloped.

56. Since the last inspection, the teaching week has been extended to bring it in line with national recommendations. The curriculum organisation has been changed in Year 7, to three bands in the place of two, to avoid the creation of very low ability groups. German and Spanish are now offered in alternate years from Year 8 to increase sixth form numbers in the second language. Issues relating to time allowance for physical education at Key Stage 4 remain unresolved, as does the non-compliance with the daily act of collective worship.

57. Overall **provision for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development** is good. This represents steady improvement since the last inspection. Religious education, music and English make a significant contribution to spiritual development. However, pupils do not have enough chances to reflect on and value both their own and other people's experiences and beliefs within assemblies and the curriculum as a whole. As a result, pupils' spiritual awareness and self-knowledge is adequate rather than good.

58. Pupils debate and reflect on moral issues in lessons such as religious education, English, drama and history. Their understanding of what is right and wrong is very good and is supported strongly by personal, social and vocational education. There is restricted scope for all pupils to contribute their ideas and suggestions for improving the school as a community. This is particularly true for the sixth form. Chances are limited for most pupils to use initiative and take responsibility on a regular basis. They have very good opportunities to work together in lessons, which they use well. Overall promotion of social development is good.

59. Cultural development is well provided for. Pupils have every encouragement to enjoy art, music and drama in and out of school. They appreciate their own cultural heritage much more than the rich and diverse traditions of wider society. Although some opportunities are available in music, English and geography, the overall provision is not planned. This results in girls missing chances to deepen their respect and tolerance for the similarities and differences between themselves and people from communities beyond the local area.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

60. Procedures for **monitoring pupils' attainment and progress** are good. An effective policy on formative assessment is implemented well in most departments. There is good central information on all pupils, with targets based on entry level tests, used throughout the school. Subject teachers, form tutors and parents are kept well informed on whether girls are on line to meet their targets. In most departments marking is consistent and pupils are given good guidance on the steps that they need to take to meet their targets. In art, music and modern foreign languages, assessment procedures are not yet good enough and information is not sufficiently well used to inform planning. In other departments there is a range of understanding of available data, with particular strengths in science and mathematics. In the science department data is interpreted very carefully to identify strengths and weaknesses in both learning and teaching. The system is gradually evolving as better performance data becomes available, but progress so far has depended on the willingness of departments to participate. Tighter management of the process is needed to ensure that the best practice is thoroughly understood and implemented in all departments, which is currently not the case.

61. Form tutors are provided with very useful information in progress reviews of individual girls. Pupils who are performing below expectations are identified through this process and there is a mentoring system to help them improve. Equally important, pupils performing at or above their target are rewarded using the school's merit system, which has a good motivating effect on learning, even with older pupils.

62. Arrangements for **child protection** are in place and comply with locally agreed procedures. The monitoring of other health and safety aspects is satisfactory; it is regular and appropriate.

63. The arrangements for **personal support and guidance** are good. Form tutors and heads of year know the pupils very well and can track pupils' personal development as well as academic progress. Behaviour management systems and strategies are inconsistent and individual to departments. There is no whole school system for promoting good behaviour. The colour-coded report cards are helpful once problems occur, although there is some reluctance by staff to use them, feeling that it would be a reflection on their competence. Instances of pupil misbehaviour in lessons which disrupted learning of others, show the importance of improving current arrangements. Outside lessons, no serious instances of oppressive behaviour or misconduct were seen during the inspection week.

64. Pupils with **special educational needs** are helped well by support staff. The reading and literacy skills of all pupils are carefully monitored during Year 7 and this is continued in subsequent years. The subject teachers of pupils with identified special educational needs are kept informed of their needs and are provided with general targets which they need to address through their teaching. Not all teachers respond to these or report whether they are achieved by the pupils. The targets set within the special needs department, for the work undertaken by support staff, are clear and focused. Progress towards the achievement of them is carefully recorded. Individual education plans are regularly reviewed with pupils and their parents but the review procedure is not well informed by information from all subject teachers. Some subject targets identified for Statemented pupils do not

fully address the requirements of the Statement, a situation which needs to be improved. The separation of responsibility for learning difficulties (in the hands of the special educational needs department) and the responsibility for addressing behavioural issues (a role for heads of year and department heads) is most unhelpful and has resulted in the behaviour issues adversely affecting learning in the lower sets. Currently insufficient support staff are available to meet the needs of pupils with learning or behaviour difficulties.

65. Procedures for **monitoring attendance** are good. Links with the education welfare officer are strong and there are effective follow-up procedures when concerns are raised about attendance.

66. The school does take satisfactory care of its pupils, but a number of improvements are needed. Strengths referred to in the last report remain – the strong pastoral teams with heads of year knowing their year group well.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

67. There has been modest improvement since the last inspection in developing useful links with parents to support pupils' learning. Relationships with parents are usually productive. A sizeable minority of parents feel that they are kept at arm's length, however, and are not always equal partners in their daughters' education. The new system of consultation evenings is causing difficulties. Form tutors, not subject teachers, meet with parents to discuss children's progress. The 'subject surgery' results in parents and teachers meeting only when problems arise, although this was not the original intention. Parents feel dissatisfied that they have no specific discussions with those who teach their children.

68. The school's regular newsletters are informative and helpful and these professional documents are appreciated by parents.

69. Information in written reports is helpful for understanding pupils' attitudes to work, but does not always clarify what progress has been made, what pupils need to do to improve and how parents can help. In the questionnaires about the school returned by parents, although three-quarters were satisfied with the information they received on the progress of their daughters, about a quarter were not. In just over a third of the responses, parents said that the school does not work closely with them, an unsatisfactorily high proportion. Many parents want their daughters to achieve and are keen to do all they can to support them. They contribute very positively to their daughters' learning by encouraging them to make the most of their opportunities. In a few cases, they take part in activities in school such as mock interviews and careers education initiatives. In general, parents are fairly satisfied with what the school provides for their daughters, particularly the overall standards achieved.

70. The special educational needs department works very closely and very well with the parents of all pupils whose needs have been identified.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

71. Under strong **leadership**, the school achieves high academic standards at almost all levels. The school's worthwhile aims are to provide a well-rounded education that encourages every girl to develop her academic, artistic and physical potential. These are seen in practice by parents and appreciated, with the result that the school is oversubscribed and many pupils travel from outside the catchment area to attend. The school is concerned, too, that the girls' behaviour, relationships and values should equip them to function as fulfilled and unselfish members of the school society and the adult world. The vigorous implementation of the school's aims by the staff creates a positive ethos at the main site. At the senior site, the lack of corporate routines in the sixth form, such as formal registrations and assemblies, detracts from the corporate character and cohesion of the upper school.

72. While, overall, there is much very effective teaching, the school has not established formal systems for **monitoring** teachers' performance in the classroom. However, in physical education, the head of department is observing teaching and learning as a way of improving overall performance and sharing good practice. The

school has devised a 'paired teaching' scheme that is already in operation in mathematics and will be implemented this year across the school. This should provide staff with free time and enable them to observe colleagues' teaching. While it is a constructive system, it falls short of the formal and systematic approach to monitoring which leads to consistently high standards of teaching and learning. There has been no formal appraisal of teaching for some years.

73. The school's priorities for development are incorporated in a wide-ranging **development plan**. This includes national priorities and those that emerge from the researches of the school's strategic development group. Key priorities include preparing for the full integration of the sixth form with that of the neighbouring boys' school in 2001. All departments are aware of the school's priorities and their own development planning reflects these. Not all the action plans are complete, but there is careful costing of priorities.

74. Much of the **organisation** of the school is successful and productive as seen in the high standards achieved in the school. The head and the two deputy headteachers have clearly defined tasks, but responsibilities are inequitably devolved. The headteacher retains responsibility for standards of teaching and learning and discusses examination results with heads of department each year, agreeing targets for the following year. Pressures of school management, particularly the major building programme and other priorities, have resulted in not all these meetings taking place and records of what has been agreed are incomplete. Heads of department lines of accountability are unclear, with few monitoring routines. The deputy headteachers and other senior staff have no direct links with departments and little shared responsibility for the standards achieved. The successful functioning of departments relies too much on the initiatives of their heads of department. This results in problems such as the lack of focus on lower attaining pupils and those girls with behaviour problems in lessons; a co-ordinated whole school approach is not followed. Major management roles of the deputy headteachers – including data collection and interpretation of pupils' performance and timetabling the agreed curriculum, although successful, could be improved through clearer involvement of other senior and middle managers. The current informal systems of communication, although sound in practice, are insufficiently rigorous in this large complex school.

75. In addition to the senior management team of three, two senior teachers manage the sixth form and the pastoral care programme, one at each site. There are some uncertainties over aspects of their pastoral and academic roles. A number of curriculum management points need to be addressed in the sixth form as the new joint sixth gets underway. A senior group of heads of department work well as individuals, and as part of the strategic management group developing important areas, such as ICT across the curriculum and assessment. The new initiative on paired teaching is being managed by one of these senior staff. Their links with senior managers are understood, but do not show clear lines of accountability. The management structure is pragmatic, uses the skills of senior staff effectively and is successful, but lacks coherence.

76. It is understandable that major changes in the way both sites are managed has been postponed because of the planned new building programme, placing all the school on one site. The headteacher has a room on both sites and visits each daily, but both deputy headteachers are based at the upper school site, and although they too work on both sites it makes communication more difficult and gives unhelpful messages about their roles as managers.

77. **Heads of department** organise and manage their departments well. They are aware of school priorities and the targets they are expected to achieve. Opportunities are few for the whole staff to meet together socially or for professional reasons, since the staffroom on the main school site is not large enough. Each department has a subject office, where each member of staff in the department has a base. This is very helpful for subject organisation, but unhelpful in bringing staff together as a team. Full staff meetings occur only once a term. Useful weekly briefing sessions, conducted by the deputy headteachers, do help with the exchange of information. A range of other meetings of senior and middle managers helps to keep each other informed of developments – senior management meetings, senior managers of the joint sixth, curriculum managers, and heads of year and education welfare officers. Despite the disadvantages of a split site, there is unanimity of purpose amongst the staff, who are strongly committed to pursuing the school's aims and attaining high standards.

78. The school reflects some of the principle of ‘**best value**’ providing courses that are appropriate for the girls and, for example, developing the joint sixth. This is an efficient and effective response to the complex and growing developments for post-16 education. Financial management and administration are very efficient and effective resulting in good resources and good quality teaching staff. All expenditure is rigorously monitored by financial managers. The formula funding of the local education authority allocates a larger figure for sixth form spending than is actually spent by the school - about 3% of the school’s budget intended for sixth form provision is used to maintain the smaller group sizes in Key Stage 3. Current shortcomings in the sixth form enrichment curriculum indicate that this should be reviewed.

79. The **governing body** fulfils its statutory duties satisfactorily. Sub-committees are appropriate and governors are kept informed about developments in the school. They monitor the school’s financial planning rigorously and successfully. Governors discuss standards achieved and are aware of areas of concern. They are individually linked with departments and make planned visits from time to time. However, their role falls short of that of ‘critical friend’ and they rely heavily on the professionalism of the senior management team over matters of strategic planning. The successes of the school’s development plan are insufficiently evaluated by the governing body.

80. The management of **special educational needs** has a number of strengths but also some areas of weakness. There has been some whole-school in-service training to address behavioural difficulties, but not for learning problems. The reorganisation of the school into three bands is a helpful strategy to overcome the problem of ‘sink groups’ where behaviour issues were more apparent. At the time of the inspection, staffing was insufficient to provide the support that these groups required. One further learning support assistant had already been appointed but had not taken up the post. Currently, the division between behaviour issues, which are dealt with by senior managers, and learning support, managed by the SENCO is unhelpful. The recently nominated governor and new line manager in the senior team recognise the problems and the potential is there for development. The attendance of the nominated link teacher from each department at regular meetings is now mandatory and this contact is developing and allowing for more input from the special needs team into subject planning. Reviews of individuals’ progress are thorough, regular and involve parents closely. This is a major contributory factor in the good relationship between parents and the department.

81. A sufficient number of teaching and non-teaching **staff**, with the necessary experience and qualifications, meet the needs of the school and the curriculum, with the exception of support staff to meet special educational needs. A high proportion of teachers have taught in the school for many years and therefore know pupils and their families very well. Pupils who are new to the school gain some reassurance from this. It helps them settle quickly into the new school and fosters good relations between staff with pastoral responsibilities and parents. A very effective team of technical and administration staff provide support and a high quality service to the school. A small number of teachers on long-term sickness absence have not been replaced by specialist, temporary teachers. Pupils in these classes are disadvantaged by the interruptions to their learning.

82. There are strengths and weaknesses in the induction arrangements for new staff. Department heads have provided a good programme that has effectively met the needs of the relatively small number of newly qualified teachers who have joined the staff in recent years. By contrast, however, the induction programme for experienced teachers lacks many of the features that staff feel they need when taking-up more senior positions in the school, notably the opportunities for discussion and feed-back on their effectiveness as managers.

83. As formal procedures for performance management and appraisal are still in the planning stages, the arrangements for professional development have been decided through more informal discussions. In this way, in addition to whole-school staff training days, much of the subject specific in-service training has been negotiated within departments. Although no formal systems are in place to measure the effectiveness and impact of professional development on standards of achievement, evidence shows that courses have been selected wisely and address national, as well as department-specific issues. Dates for training days currently do not coincide for the two schools involved in the joint sixth form. This has an impact on the teaching sixth formers receive.

84. Effective use is made of the available **accommodation** on both sites and plans are well advanced to bring the school on to one in the near future. The current accommodation is well-maintained by the site manager and his

team and is treated with respect by the girls. Rooms are generally of a good size. The school has temporary classrooms on both of its sites. These have been maintained to a good standard and provide satisfactory accommodation. The planned move to one site will enable many of the present shortcomings in accommodation to be rectified and should enable improvements in efficiency by reducing the time lost in commuting between sites, and the duplication and transport of resources in some subjects.

85. **Resources** for learning are good overall and make a positive contribution to improving girls' learning. Substantial progress has been made since the last inspection in the provision of resources for ICT and plans are in hand to maintain this progress. These resources are beginning to be used very effectively in many departments to raise standards. The facilities in the learning resource centre based in the library are well used during and outside lesson times. This enables girls who do not have access to computers at home to use them at school to improve their work.

86. Since the last inspection six years ago, the school has maintained most of its significant strengths and further improved in several areas. The trend of improvement in Key Stage 3 test scores has been above the national picture, good GCSE results have been maintained and the standards achieved in the sixth form have improved to a high level. Low standards in information technology have been resolved. The physical education department has made good progress but a shortfall in curriculum time remains a problem. The enthusiastic and hard working attitude of many girls is still a strength. The systems of internal review referred to in 1994 have developed too slowly and this is an area of weakness. Strengths in teaching have been maintained with good effects on pupils' learning. Teaching is now more 'polarised' however, with greater strengths, but also some weaknesses. High quality relationships with most girls have been maintained, girls' academic achievements are effectively monitored but problems of behaviour management have emerged which restrict achievement for lower attaining pupils. Development planning is good, but lines of communication are still not as good as they should be. Overall, improvements outweigh problems, but not all the key issues identified in the last report are yet satisfactorily dealt with. Sound improvement has been made since the last report.

COMMUNITY LINKS

87. The school has very strong links with the local community, which enrich the curriculum, particularly in the arts and vocational courses. Well-established links with employers make a significant contribution to highly effective careers education and work experience programmes. All year groups make good use of facilities locally and further afield to extend learning opportunities. These include projects such as Challenge 21 and the Key Skills initiative, work with London primary pupils and residential visits, in this country and abroad. The local youth centre based at the main school site is a very useful facility which the school supports. Community links are a strength of the school.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

88. The governors should include in their post-inspection action plan the way in which they are going to respond to the following issues, in order to raise standards in the school. The governors, headteacher and staff should:

- improve the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning and so enhance the attitudes to learning and the knowledge and understanding of lower attainers. This will be achieved through
 - more consistent and rigorous evaluation of the girls' experiences in the classroom which will enable improvements to be made in teaching
 - clarifying the roles of senior and middle managers in this process

[paragraphs 37, 72, 74, 75]
- improve communication both within the school, particularly between senior managers and faculties, and with parents. This will be achieved by:
 - a change in approach, so that sufficient time is given to communicating effectively with all involved in the school community

- ensuring that the good data produced on girls' performance is used effectively to identify areas for improvement through systematic training of staff in its use.

The current situation where neither staffroom on either site is sufficiently large for all staff to meet together is a key contributory cause. The proposed building programme provides an opportunity to deal with this situation [paragraphs 60, 67, 69, 74, 76, 77, 82]

- ensure that a small number of disruptive girls, often in lower sets, do not restrict the learning of others. This will be achieved through
 - better whole school systems for dealing with misbehaviour
 - ensuring that all staff have appropriate teaching strategies
 [paragraphs 31, 32, 37, 63, 80]
- * Ensure that the curriculum fully meets requirements by:
 - meeting the National Curriculum requirements for design and technology in Key Stage 4
 - providing sufficient time for physical education in Key Stage 4
 - providing religious education for all pupils in the sixth form
 - providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils
 [paragraph 46, 47, 126, 168, 170]
- Improve the balance and quality of sixth form provision, while maintaining the good range of academic courses, the very good teaching and the high standards achieved, by:
 - including opportunity for physical education for all
 - ensuring that staff in-service days are agreed jointly by the governing bodies of the two schools which share the sixth form, so that the same five dates are used by both schools.
 - Providing more opportunities for the lower and upper sixth to meet together and form a cohesive unit. Currently communication between the two sixth form year groups is not positive
 - Increasing the planned opportunities for responsibilities and involvement by girls in whole school activities through, for example, an effective school's council
 [paragraphs 29, 46, 47, 71, 83, 169]

89. Other less important weaknesses

- Improve punctuality, working within the constraints that result from two buildings separated by a ten minute walk. *paragraph 34*
- Review the use of funds provided for sixth form, to ensure that they are fully utilised for their intended purpose. *paragraph 78*
- improve timetabling arrangements, reducing the number of double periods, and the number of 'split classes'; also ensure that period allocations for subjects are fairly distributed throughout the week for the benefit of the girls. *paragraph 52*
- review the banding and setting system to ensure that assessment processes result in appropriate placements of girls, with good opportunities within the year to review individual girls' progress. *paragraph 51*
- Ensure that all relevant staff have a clear understanding of specific aspects of individual pupils' special educational needs and ensure that there are sufficient support staff to meet pupils' needs. *paragraphs 64,80,81*
- Pull together the management of support for all pupils with special educational needs, irrespective of whether the needs relate to behavioural or learning problems. *paragraph 80*
- Increase the governors' 'critical friend' role. *paragraph 79*
- Implement the whole-school numeracy policy to ensure a coherent approach across all faculties. *paragraph 38, 107*
- Improve curriculum planning and assessment systems in Key Stage 3 art, modern foreign languages and music. *paragraphs 53,60, 119, 120, 160, 165*
- Continue to map and develop ICT through the curriculum and provide the resources and training to support this. *paragraphs 85, 151*

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

184

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils

41

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6	27	40	24	4	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1244	236
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	106	5

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	11	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	207	2

English as an additional language

	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	28

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	56
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	75

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	7.7
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.5
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	1999	0	250	250

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Girls	193	187	177
	Total	193	187	177
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77	75	71
	National	63	62	55
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	47	51	41
	National	28	38	23

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Girls	178	184	197
	Total	178	184	197
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	71	74	79
	National	64	64	60
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	43	48	41
	National	31	37	28

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	1999	0	250	250

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Girls	142	236	246
	Total	142	236	246
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	(66) 57	(95) 94	(97) 98
	National	(45) 47	(90) 91	(95) 96

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	(46) 45
	National	(37) 38

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0
	National	N/a

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	1999	0	83	83

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	N/a	21.2	(17.5) 21.2	N/a	4.2	(2.9) 4.2
National	17.7	18.1	(17.6) 17.9	2.7	2.8	(2.8) 2.8

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate	
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	4	100
	National		82.5

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	1
Black – other	2
Indian	1
Pakistani	0
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	4
White	1459
Any other minority ethnic group	10

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	3	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7– Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	86.4
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.1

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	6
Total aggregate hours worked per week	128

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.1
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	24.5
Key Stage 4	21.8

Financial information

Financial year	1999/2000
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	£
Total income	3816594
Total expenditure	3638496
Expenditure per pupil	2459
Balance brought forward from previous year	86388
Balance carried forward to next year	264486

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1480
Number of questionnaires returned	220

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	34	52	10	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	37	54	6	1	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	19	60	7	3	11
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	17	55	19	6	2
The teaching is good.	24	57	8	1	9
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	22	50	21	5	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	33	46	12	6	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	49	43	3	2	3
The school works closely with parents.	16	47	25	9	3
The school is well led and managed.	26	49	8	5	11
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	30	55	7	1	6
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	36	48	5	2	10

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

90. In 1999, standards in English at the end of Key Stage 3 in national tests were well above both the national and similar schools' averages. Almost half of the pupils gained one grade higher than the national expectation. Over the last three years, the results have been variable but the trend is upwards.

91. Results in GCSE English in 1999 were in line with the national average for all maintained schools and girls' comprehensive schools, as they have been for the last three years, with a high proportion at the highest grades. GCSE English literature results have been above average for the same period, though not all pupils are entered for this examination.

92. GCE A-level results in 1999 were well above average for maintained schools in both English literature and the combined literature and language examinations, with a high proportion of pupils gaining A grades. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection.

93. Current attainment by the majority of pupils at the end of Year 9 is good, sound at the end of Year 10 and very good in the sixth form. Those pupils who enter the school with high levels of competence make good progress as they move through the key stages. The progress made by pupils with special educational needs and those of average to low attainment is satisfactory.

94. Pupils in all stages speak with confidence, answering and posing questions and expressing opinions openly and politely. They discuss well in small groups, reporting to the class and evaluating their work. Good speaking and listening skills amongst the pupils result from lessons planned with a strong awareness of their importance. A class of Year 7 pupils analysing and comparing tourist information leaflets presented their findings with confidence, pinpointing subtleties in persuasive language and graphics. By the age of 14, pupils can discuss critically a good range of literary, non-literary and media texts and explain the intentions of the authors. 15 year olds, working on magazine advertising, showed good knowledge of the vocabulary specific to this medium and good critical thinking. Pupils' learning in Key Stages 3 and 4 underpins more sophisticated approaches to analysing language in the sixth form. The good progression and continuity between the key stages has improved considerably since the last inspection. By the age of 17, pupils studying A-level literature confront a wide range of texts with maturity and high achieving pupils engage in discussion and debate with impressive self-assurance.

95. Attainment in reading is good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in Year 12. Pupils throughout the school read for information and most also read independently for pleasure. The high standard achieved in reading demanding texts results from constructive and detailed guidance from teachers.

96. Writing is good; pupils benefit from building and improving their work with careful planning and drafting, a practice they learn when they first enter the school. Most pupils pay attention to accurate punctuation and spelling and to the good presentation of their work. Much finished work is very well word-processed. There are examples, particularly amongst the higher achieving pupils at all stages, of very perceptive written responses. However, a minority of middle and lower achieving pupils become careless, disorganised and some become disaffected by Year 10. This is the result of some uninspired methods of teaching and also the difficulty and quantity of demanding GCSE language and literature texts.

97. Pupils have a serious approach to English and are motivated to do well, especially in their examinations. They are conscientious, sustaining their efforts and responding positively when expectations of work and behaviour are high and when given opportunities to use their initiative. There are examples of pupils in all years who make considerable efforts to achieve good results. The very poor behaviour of a small number of pupils in the lower sets in Year 10 distracts and prevents the learning of others. Attempts to address this whole school problem within the faculty have, so far, made little impact.

98. The overall quality of teaching is good and the excellent relationships noted in the last inspection still predominate. Theatre visits, arranged to support class work, and a sixth form residential visit to Dorset to further the study of Thomas Hardy, are just two examples of the strong contribution by the English faculty to the social and cultural life of the school. Teaching is good in Key Stage 3, sound in Key Stage 4 – where there were one or two unsatisfactory aspects - and very good in the sixth form, where the interaction of the pupils' commitment and the teachers' enthusiasm accelerates progress. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subject, are reassuring and seek to boost the pupils' self esteem. The use of homework is a strength. In the best lessons, teachers seek an imaginative approach - a good example was the surprise element in the introduction to Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales' in Year 8. Opportunities for the faculty to share good practice are planned but limited at present. Teaching is more successful with the lower achieving pupils when the language and the task are appropriately pitched, as in a Year 9 class where pupils were writing letters and stories to send to a disadvantaged school in Kenya with whom they had already made good contact. Extra support for pupils with special educational needs is inadequate and this limits their progress. The very few pupils who are at the early stages of language development in English are effectively supported, and the increasing proportion in the school, for whom English is an additional language but who have no language deficit, are fully integrated into classes.

99. Management is administratively efficient with good internal consultation and co-operation under a new head of faculty. Systems and procedures are clear. Helpful handbooks are available for GCSE and A-level pupils. However, the English faculty is not always sufficiently involved with senior management in formally reviewing and discussing issues and developments, with the result that not enough importance or value is attached to careful monitoring and target setting, good practice is not shared or acknowledged and lower set difficulties are unresolved. This was noted as a weakness at the last inspection and has remained unchanged.

Literacy

100. Attainment in literacy across the curriculum is good. Most pupils acquire sufficiently well developed skills to feel confident in speaking, reading and writing in all subjects. The use of correct vocabulary is emphasised, helped by lists of key words displayed in classrooms. Question and answer sessions are given time and importance in lessons. The emphasis by several subjects on the use and comparison of various types of source materials and a variety of media helps to develop pupils' independent research skills. The standard of presentation and quality of writing is generally high. For example, some of the projects in design and technology GCSE are outstanding. In common with science, history, information technology and many other subjects, design technology contributes to and benefits from a pronounced focus on language development. The school is in the process of implementing a policy on literacy. It is seen as a key to improving learning and raising standards in all subjects, particularly – but not only - amongst those pupils who have problems with the basic skills of reading and writing when they first come to the school.

MATHEMATICS

101. Results in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were well above the national average for all schools in 1999. They continued the improving trend in results and were the best ever achieved by the school. They were above the average for similar schools. When compared to national results they were just below those obtained by the same pupils in English and science. GCSE results in 1999 for A*-C grades were above the national average for all schools and similar girls' schools, with an above average number of pupils obtaining A and A* grades. Results for A*-G grades were about average, although a higher than average proportion of pupils sat the examination. Results were similar to those in 1998 and at the time of the last inspection. Pupils' results in mathematics were better than their results in several other subjects. A-level results in 1999 were close to national averages. They were not as good as in 1998 but similar to those at the time of the last inspection.

102. In lessons and in other work current attainment of pupils in mathematics is above the national average in Key Stages 3 and 4. By the end of Key Stage 3 almost all pupils have acquired basic number skills. They use decimals, fractions and percentages accurately and most can solve simple equations. They understand transformation geometry including the rotation of simple shapes. Investigative skills are generally well developed. Higher attainers follow their own lines of enquiry. They analyse their results, generalising and testing their conclusions. By the end of Year 10 higher attaining pupils reach standards which are well above average across all programmes of study. They

calculate areas and volumes of pyramids and use trigonometry in obtuse angled triangles. Other pupils use positive and negative indices and present solutions in standard form. In Year 12 A-level classes most pupils reach standards that are average or above average. They have secure algebraic skills and use calculus to evaluate areas and solve problems. They reach good standards in calculus and algebra, and solve trigonometrical equations.

103. Although the quality of teaching and learning was good in over half of the lessons observed, it was not always satisfactory at Key Stage 4. Behaviour management strategies were sometimes insufficient to prevent a minority of lower attaining pupils from making little effort and behaving badly. In many lessons, learning was enhanced by pupils' keen interest and desire to do well. Girls generally were attentive during class teaching and sustained high levels of concentration when working independently. In double lessons, however, lower attaining pupils found it very difficult to sustain their effort. A number of pupils find mathematics dull and difficult. Most pupils enjoy positive relationships with their teachers and seek help when appropriate. In some lessons, pupils collaborated and helped each other to make progress. Considering their previous attainment, most pupils' achievement in lessons and over time is good at Key Stage 3 and A-level, and satisfactory at Key Stage 4. The quality of teaching observed in each key stage broadly corresponded to these learning judgements and the quality is sound overall, with some good aspects.

104. Teachers are well qualified and have good expertise to teach their classes effectively. They plan their lessons well, introduce them clearly and give suitable examples to illustrate methods. For example, in a Year 8 lesson asymmetric figures were drawn to help pupils understand how to rotate complicated shapes. By demonstrations and good use of questioning the teacher helped pupils to appreciate the principle of rotation which they then used to solve problems. Good use of resources in some lessons assists understanding. For example, in a Year 7 middle ability group, pupils used cardboard boxes which they flattened. By careful measurements they found the surface areas corresponding to the volumes which they had already calculated. This helped them to see the relationship between length, area and volume. It also improved their measurement skills. Class management is usually satisfactory and often good. This enables the majority of pupils to make good use of their time. In most lessons teachers strike a good balance between class teaching and pupils working independently. This helps pupils to sustain their interest and improves their learning. Assessment is used effectively and assists progress, although not all work is marked. Homework is set regularly. It is appropriate and reinforces the work covered in lessons.

105. The mathematics department is well led and organised. Relationships are good and staff are mutually supportive and committed to raising standards. There is some good monitoring of teaching and learning although formal lesson observation is not at present in place. Setting arrangements are good and support teaching and learning. The curriculum is broad and balanced for all pupils including those with special educational needs. Books and resources are sufficient and of good quality.

106. The department has made good progress since the last inspection. There has been an improvement in National Curriculum test results and they are now well above average. GCSE and A-level standards have been maintained. There has been an improvement in aspects of teaching and mental arithmetic is now a bigger feature of lessons. Problem solving at Key Stage 3 is now seen in a practical context and at Key Stage 4 investigations are properly related to the other attainment targets

Numeracy

107. Pupils in Year 7 entered the school with above average standards of numeracy, although standards have been average in other years. These are continually developed not only in mathematics lessons but also in some other subjects. For example in science pupils calculate moments of forces, electrical power and resistance. They also evaluate formulae and use graphs to illustrate data and demonstrate relationships. Mental arithmetic is also tested at the end of lessons. In geography, statistics are evaluated and interpreted, and line graphs and histograms are constructed. Co-ordinates are used to define grid references and directions and bearings are calculated. Spreadsheets are used well in information technology to manipulate numbers and perform calculations. In design and technology accurate weighing and measuring are stressed as part of the curriculum, and data is collated and analysed to enhance the quality and validity of design work. In all these subjects, pupils' numeracy skills make a positive contribution to pupils' achievements. This will be further enhanced by the implementation of a whole-school numeracy policy to ensure standardisation across all departments. Students on GNVQ and BTEC courses have sound number and

graphical skills. They perform calculations accurately and use spreadsheets confidently. They are less certain in data interpretation but are given good support in lessons.

SCIENCE

108. Results in science at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were well above national averages. They were above those in similar schools at level 5 and well above similar schools at level 6 and in terms of point scores. They have been consistently high over the past four years. Attainment seen in lessons and work samples in Years 7 to 9 was very good overall. Able pupils performed above expectations and the achievement of less able pupils was also sometimes very good. The presentation and standard of work in pupils' books was of high quality. Pupils were able to perform sophisticated tasks such as investigation of sound waves with an oscilloscope and a computer simulation, and sustained projects, written for a range of audiences, on everyday applications of forces.

109. At GCSE, all pupils study double science and standards attained in 1999 were above national averages and those for girls' comprehensive schools. There are higher than average percentages at grades A*, A and B. There are lower than average percentages at grades D, E, F and G. One area of relative weakness is that the proportion of C grades is a little lower and D grades a little higher than might be expected, indicating some underachievement among middle ranking pupils. On the other hand, standards seen in Year 10 books and science coursework were good for pupils of all abilities. High ability pupils produced excellent coursework, closely linked to scientific understanding, predicting patterns from data and preparing difficult conceptual work on, for example, water potential.

110. At A-level, numbers have fluctuated but the results in 1999 were well above national averages. In biology, chemistry and physics, the pass rate and the number of pupils with A and B grades were well above national averages. The A-level point score per pupil in all science subjects exceeded averages by 1-2 grades. In the current Year 12, numbers are smaller and standards meet, but do not exceed, national expectations, as judged by coursework and the school's baseline grades. Pupils were able to carry through independent investigations in physics and produce high quality, good work in genetics. In chemistry, they were able to ask challenging questions and had a good relationship with their teachers.

111. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are, in general, very good. They lead to very good learning in all key stages. In one or two classes, this is not so and poor behaviour can undermine learning. However, most lower ability sets in Key Stages 3 and 4 are well managed in science and learning is good or very good in the majority of classes. The pace of work was good in all key stages. Pupils were able to use ICT with good effect, such as the Year 8 class, where all pupils gathered useful information on satellites using sophisticated search techniques. They were also able to deal with numerical problems, such as the Year 10 class that carried out calculations on electric current, power and resistance.

112. The quality of teaching observed in the science department was good overall. This was true in all key stages and there was no evidence of a lapse in quality in Key Stage 4, which was suggested in the previous report. There were very good examples of behaviour management in the lower sets, which produced effective investigative work, for example on the growth of yeast. Teachers had high expectations, with able pupils being challenged and producing work of a high standard, such as numerical work in physics, and balancing of chemical equations. Teachers showed very good knowledge of their subject, which was particularly beneficial in sixth form work. They also produced explanations of high quality such as the functioning of electromagnetic devices, including relays and loudspeakers. The general quality of learning objectives and teaching materials was high although occasionally work was not as well matched as it could have been to the needs of lower attainers. Homework was mentioned in all plans and set carefully in lessons.

113. The faculty is very well managed. A strong team spirit is evident and the recruitment, induction and training of new staff contribute to the good standard of teaching and the standards of achievement obtained. Assessment is very good. The department monitors its own performance through pupil target setting and detailed analysis of test results, particularly in Key Stage 4. This information is used to motivate pupils and also to check that teaching is consistent and of high quality. Nevertheless there are some vestiges of inconsistency (between

sound and very good) in the way that teachers implement the schemes of work. Further development of classroom observation, planned by the faculty, will assist the dissemination of the very good practice observed. Accommodation is not ideal. The dispersal of the faculty over two sites, with two buildings on one site, leads to problems for technicians and lateness by staff and pupils.

114. The department has improved on the picture described in the previous report. Standards in Key Stage 4 are now building upon those in Key Stage 3 and there are detailed learning objectives for both GCSE and A-level. The faculty has made use of the local environment and is engaged in developing a nature area.

ART

115. Results in the 1999 GCSE and A-level examinations are a strength of the school and have improved since the last inspection. In the GCSE examinations the percentage of pupils gaining A*-C grades was very high when compared with schools nationally and well above average for girls' schools. The percentage of pupils gaining higher, A*, A and B grades was very high. The results compare favourably with other subjects in the school. The work by pupils currently in Year 10 shows similar high levels of achievement. In sketchbooks standards of independent research are high. Pupils make careful notes and thoughtful comments about their own and others' work. Ideas are drawn from artists' work and from observational drawings of, for example, people, plants, animals and insects. These studies have been used as the basis for developing larger scale paintings, prints and sculpture. In one class pupils used their preliminary work on insects to create imaginative and extravagantly designed shoes. Papier mache, card and a variety of other materials were used for the basic construction and then beads, string and paint were added as surface decoration. The work showed considerable skill and imagination both in the design and construction stages and in the way materials had been used.

116. Attainment in the A and A/S level examinations was well above average. The average point score for art and design and art history examinations was very high and in the photography course it was above average. Examination results have remained at the present high levels for 2 years. The combination of courses on offer and the informal opportunities and exposure students have to work from the various art and design courses have a positive impact. Similarly the opportunities for extra-curricular activities, life drawing classes and visits to national and local galleries and museums, adds to the scope and quality of the work the girls are ready to undertake. In lessons, girls in Year 12 were using the photographs and sketches they made during a visit to Italy to inform aspects of their paintings and in a life drawing class they practiced and refined their preparatory studies before starting work on life-size sculptures. Overall, the work shows a good understanding of analytical research and investigation and high quality prints, paintings and sculpture.

117. At the end of Key Stage 3 attainment is above expectation and the majority of pupils make good progress. Pupils use books and computers to gather information about the work of artists and designers and they express themselves fluently in speech and writing. Most develop a good range of practical skills. Lower sets, where pupils have been grouped according to their attainment in science, include pupils who achieve high standards in art. However, the behaviour of a small minority of pupils in these sets disrupts the pace of learning and the progress of other pupils, causing some to lose their initial interest and enthusiasm for the subject. In other classes standards are high and progress good. For example in a Year 8 class pupils used the recurring themes found in the work of Georgia O'Keeffe as the stimulus for their own designs of ceramic bowls. They experimented with different patterns and textures and could give reasoned explanations about why they felt some were more successful than others. In a Year 9 class pupils designed and then assembled a container for nuts and, when asked to critically evaluate their work, demonstrated an awareness of the impact of graphic design, packaging and marketing on the buying public.

118. The quality of teaching and learning was sound in Key Stage 3, good in Year 10 and very good in Year 12. Overall, teaching and learning are good. Teachers have very good subject expertise and they use their skills effectively to set imaginative tasks, appropriately matched to examination assessment criteria. The tasks motivate students and promote high standards. Teachers have high expectations and rigorously encourage the girls to improve. Visits abroad make a positive contribution to success in examinations and help build very good relationships. Pupils are taught, and are encouraged to practice, the skills that enable them to learn independently and they acquire a wide repertoire of practical skills, knowledge and understanding.

119. Demonstrations and exemplar materials are used regularly to explain a particular technique. They are most effective in raising standards where teachers involve pupils, check their understanding and ask challenging questions. In Key Stage 3 there are weaknesses in long and short-term planning and assessment. Insufficient use is made of the assessments of pupils' work to shape the next stages of their learning and the criteria for assessment is not shared with pupils. This restricts their ability to accurately appraise their progress and make necessary changes. In Key Stage 4 and post-16 courses, the structure of the examination syllabus provides the focus for learning and assessment that is lacking at Key Stage 3.

120. Management of the department is good. Teachers share a commitment to raising standards and have achieved considerable success. Since the last inspection, results in GCSE and A-level examinations have improved. Further work is still needed in planning work that appropriately challenges the full ability range and meets the learning needs identified through assessments of pupils' work. The Key Stage 3 curriculum plans need to be revised to address changes in the National Curriculum and to include greater access to computers and appropriate software.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

121. The 1999 GCSE examination results show above average attainment at A*-C grades for girls taking graphic products and resistant materials when compared to all girls in maintained schools. Results at grade A*-C food and textiles are in line with national averages. The number of girls achieving the higher grades A* and A is well above the national average in all areas. Results for all subjects at A*-G grades are in line with national averages. Results are in line with those obtained in 1998 and at the time of the last inspection.

122. Standards currently, at the end of Key Stage 3 and Year 10, are above national expectations in all design and technology subjects. In both key stages girls' design work is good. They use a wide range of graphical techniques to present their ideas well, and research and analysis are detailed and evaluative. Practical skills are also well developed with carefully manufactured products in all subjects. A significant minority of work is of the very highest quality. Girls use computers effectively to improve the quality of their research and presentation of ideas. In both key stages most girls' achievements are good and they make good progress, although a small but significant minority of girls, taught together in lower attaining sets, underachieve.

123. The quality of teaching was good overall in both key stages. There was much good, very good and a little outstanding teaching as well as a very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching. Planning was strong in all but a very few lessons. Most lessons had clear objectives, contained suitably varied activities to maintain girls' interest and motivation, and time was well planned to maintain a brisk and interesting pace. In the very good lessons questions were used effectively to engage girls in the activity and to test and reinforce their knowledge and understanding. In the outstanding lesson the teacher combined a practical demonstration with challenging questions to ensure girls understood. This lesson was conducted with great enthusiasm capturing the girls' imagination and involving them in a wide discussion in which their own experience was valued by all. This created a very positive learning ethos in which all girls had the confidence to contribute their ideas. Teachers are very knowledgeable about their subjects, demonstrate skills well and use appropriate technical vocabulary. In some rooms key technical vocabulary was prominently displayed. This helped to reinforce girls' use of technical language. The teaching of girls with behavioural and learning difficulties is more variable. In one lesson they were taught very effectively and made good progress. In this lesson activities were appropriately varied to match the girls' span of concentration and the objectives of tasks were modified to match their abilities. In an unsatisfactory lesson only one question and answer activity was attempted for a full teaching period. Girls found it difficult to concentrate and did not participate fully for much of the time and as a consequence they became restless, shouting out answers and failing to listen to one another and to the teacher. Progress in this lesson was unsatisfactory.

124. Girls' attitudes to learning are generally good at all key stages. However, where set structures bring together significant numbers of girls with challenging behaviour, the quality of learning is sometimes unsatisfactory.

125. Teachers mark girls' work regularly using the school marking scheme and convert this into National Curriculum grades for end of key stage assessments. Computer aided administration is used effectively to record and collate attainment across all subjects. This gives all staff a clear picture of the progress of each girl as they move from one teacher to another in the Key Stage 3 carousel. Some particularly effective practice takes place in Year 9 where criteria based mark schemes are shared with girls at the start and then throughout a major project. This encourages precise discussions between the teachers and girls about how they can improve their work and as a result standards are improved and girls are well prepared for their transition to GCSE in Key Stage 4.

126. The curriculum at Key Stage 3 is broad and balanced covering the programmes of study in line with National Curriculum requirements. Statutory requirements are not being met at Key Stage 4, as all girls do not follow a course of study in design and technology. Aspects of computer-aided manufacture are underdeveloped. However, equipment to support this aspect of the curriculum will be installed as part of the redevelopment programme for the site.

127. Management of the department is good overall. Documentation gives clear guidelines on policies, practices and the teaching programmes. Morale is high and all members of the department work well as a team. Monitoring of teaching takes place informally but is not sufficiently systematic to identify and share good practice for example when teaching girls with behavioural and learning needs.

128. Good improvement has taken place in response to the last inspection report. Results and attainment have remained above average. Teaching remains good especially for the middle and above average attaining girls. Paper resources for research purposes have been improved and the introduction of the use of the computer for research, analysis and presentation purposes has improved the quality of work. The quality of design work has improved over that reported at the time of the last inspection. The departmental development planning process is now satisfactory.

GEOGRAPHY

129. Girls make sound progress at Key Stage 3 and achievement in relation to prior learning is satisfactory. The attainment of pupils currently in Year 9 is above national expectations. The results of 1999 teacher assessments are in line with those reported nationally. The pupils develop an appropriate vocabulary and are proficient in a range of skills; for example, they have a developing spatial awareness and good atlas skills. Their written work is accurate and well presented.

130. In 1999, GCSE results were well above the national average for all and girls' comprehensive schools. The proportion of pupils achieving the higher grades was above the national averages, though those attaining grades A* - G was marginally below the national figure. Standards have improved since the time of the last report and the trend over the past three years has been upward. Current attainment in Year 10 is above the expected level and achievement in relation to prior learning is good. Pupils are able to use subject terms accurately, they have a good understanding of both human and physical processes and an appreciation of environmental issues.

131. Results at A-level in 1999 were higher than the national average but lower than in the majority of other subjects in the school; all students achieved a grade in the range A-E and under half the higher grades A and B. Attainment in Year 12 is above the level expected at this stage; girls have good skills in the analysis and interpretation of data and produce accurate and well-structured written work.

132. The department makes a very good contribution to the development of pupils' literacy skills. Pupils are encouraged to listen carefully and develop their answers in oral questioning, they have frequent opportunities to discuss their work and make presentations. The focus on the development of subject skills and the use of both qualitative and quantitative measures provides frequent practice in number. In a lesson where population and capacity were considered, Year 12 students displayed very well developed skills and understanding in interpreting graphs and applying models. Very good use is made of ICT in the delivery of the subject. This was a weakness at the time of the last inspection, and now a strength. Girls produce an excellent "Geography Newsletter" which is posted in classrooms.

133. In lessons, pupils respect the contributions of others, their answers being valued by the teachers. Behaviour in the classrooms was good, most pupils sustained their concentration and listened carefully. They were interested and some groups were enthusiastic. Pupils are encouraged to work independently and this was especially noticeable in classes of higher attaining pupils.

134. The quality of teaching observed at Key Stage 3 was good. The lessons were planned carefully to provide opportunities to develop subject knowledge, understanding and skills, taking into account the differing needs of the pupils. Teachers usually had high expectations of the pupils and the teaching was enthusiastic. All teachers are specialists and their knowledge of their subject is good; their exposition was clear and effective, and girls were questioned well. Occasionally lower attainers had insufficient support in lessons, however, and work was not always well enough matched to their needs. The teaching in Year 10 was very good, as exemplified by a lesson which involved pupils making decisions about the siting of a dam; meticulous preparation, very good subject knowledge and high expectations combined to advance the pupils' learning effectively. In the small number of Year 12 lessons observed, the teaching was very good. The teaching makes a valuable contribution to the development of pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In a lesson with Year 7 pupils, the study of the development of a village took into account the impact on the environment and the advantages and disadvantages to the people involved. There were occasional weaknesses in teaching, where the teacher's contribution dominated and pace was slow because learning intentions were unclear.

135. Evidence from pupils' books showed that their work is marked regularly and teachers maintain very useful records. These enable accurate predictions to be made of pupils' examination grades. A minority of parents, however, stated that marking of their daughters' work had been sporadic in the past, and unhelpful. Current marking does not provide the pupils with sufficient information on how improvement may be achieved. Homework is set regularly providing opportunities for extending and reinforcing classwork.

136. Enthusiastic leadership and effective management is provided. The expertise and subject knowledge of the team is a further strength. Curriculum planning is thorough, the schemes of work provide detailed guidance which contributes to the quality of teaching and learning. Teaching staff and resources are effectively deployed but too much of the teaching takes place in non-specialist rooms and this has an impact on the quality of learning experience. The department reacted positively to the issues raised in the last report. Teaching of the subject has improved and there have been some improvements in attainment at all stages.

HISTORY

137. The history department was inspected at a most inopportune time as both the senior teachers of the subject were on extended leave. This has clearly had a considerable effect on the working of the department. The assessment of pupils' work has been affected and departmental plans have not been fully implemented. Teachers have been generous with their time and goodwill to ensure the least possible negative effect on the pupils' learning, but the arrangements made to cover this absence have not been wholly effective. Appropriate supply teacher cover has not always been available with the result that other teachers have been overburdened.

138. Standards of attainment have improved since the time of the last report. The results of the 1999 teacher assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 are in line with the averages reported nationally. Pupils' achievement in relation to prior learning is satisfactory and those with special needs, a small but significant group, and high attaining pupils make appropriate progress. The attainment of current Year 9 pupils is above national expectations. Pupils are able to explain historical points using appropriate terms and have a good understanding of chronology. They produce accurate written work, which is well presented and reflects good knowledge and understanding.

139. There have been fluctuations in the standards of attainment in GCSE examinations, but the overall trend in results is one of improvement. Results in 1999 were below the mean for the school, and attainment of the majority of subjects fell short of those achieved in 1998 when they were very good. History results were, however, still better than those of all and similar girls' schools nationally. Current attainment in Year 10 is above the level expected and achievement in relation to prior learning is good.

140. Results at A-level in 1999 were well above the national average with almost two-thirds of students achieving A and B grades and all achieving a grade in the range A-E. Attainment of the current Year 12s is well above the expected level. Girls are making very good progress in relation to their prior learning and achievement is very good.

141. The attention given to the development of pupils' literacy skills is a strength of the department, as is the development of ICT skills through the subject. An audit of number has been carried out and strategies are being developed which will contribute to the development of pupils' skills in this area. This is good practice.

142. Over half of the teaching of history observed was good and little that was seen was unsatisfactory. In Key Stage 3 the overall quality was sound. The small proportion of teaching seen in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form was insufficient to make an overall judgement, but evidence of girls' work and discussions with pupils indicated that the overall standard was at least sound in Key Stage 4 and the quality was good in the sixth form. In all stages teachers are aware of individual girls' specific learning needs and include such information in their lesson preparation. The best teaching was of the sixth form, where girls demonstrated their extensive and detailed knowledge, and sophisticated skills, as they listened and responded to a tape-recording made at the time of the fiftieth anniversary of the 'Easter Rising'. They identified links between 1916 and the present day, drew on their knowledge from other subject areas to demonstrate their understanding and made balanced appraisals of the different interpretations of the events.

143. The planning of lessons was particularly good and well supported by the detailed schemes of work. In almost all lessons teachers explained points well. They had good subject knowledge and encouraged the pupils to ask questions and discuss their work. Pupils' learning was most effective when lessons included a range of activities matching their needs and challenging them, as when encouraged to make judgements on the basis of evidence. In a lesson on the Holocaust, through the deliberate disclosure of factual information and the measured use of the sources available, pupils developed an appropriate sense of horror as the events unfolded. Teachers show objectivity and sensitivity when dealing with controversial and/or emotive issues. A significant contribution is made to the development of spiritual, moral social and cultural awareness. Homework is set regularly and used to good effect. Weaknesses in the teaching occurred where expectations were not high enough, lessons lacked pace as a result of unfocused discussion, and explanations lacked substance. Such features were most evident in the teaching of lower attaining pupils. Here learning was least effective, especially when girls were not supported by learning assistants.

144. Teachers keep good assessment records and learning is supported through the thorough marking of pupils' work. Some progress has been made in the use of assessment information but too few short-term targets are set and little information is given to pupils as to how they might achieve improvement. Pupils showed interest in the subject and behaviour was good. Higher attaining pupils develop good independent learning skills as they move through the school but for other girls too few opportunities are provided for them to take responsibility for aspects of their own learning. The department is well led and managed. Appropriately qualified staff and good resources are effectively deployed in the teaching and learning. There are very good displays of pupils' work which enhance the specialist teaching areas but, too often, teachers are required to use other rooms and this does detract from the quality of the learning environment for the girls. Since the last report, standards of attainment have improved as has the range of activities available for lower attaining pupils.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

145. Standards in GCSE at the end of Key Stage 4 are very high compared with those for all maintained schools and girls' comprehensive schools nationally. They have improved in each of the last three years. Almost all pupils who did not follow the GCSE course had the opportunity to use their computer-based work in other subjects to obtain a short course qualification in information and communications technology. Although standards at the highest grades were below national expectations in this, all who entered achieved a pass grade (G or higher), which is better than the national expectation.

146. In lessons and work seen, standards are slightly better than national expectations. In Year 9, all pupils can use the facilities of wordprocessors to enhance the presentation of their work and most are able to choose when,

for example, it would be better to use a desktop publishing program. Most can combine text, charts and pictures and a few find and integrate a wide range of types of information such as maps from the Internet. All are able to write and test simple control procedures. Although scanners are available, not many pupils are using these and pictures and hand-produced material such as charts are usually stuck into work. In Year 10, many pupils wordprocess their work in a wide range of subjects and some use scanners to incorporate their own pictures. Many have a good understanding of procedures for developing, testing and refining control procedures. It was only possible to see a small amount of sixth form work during the inspection, but the standards in this were also better than national expectations.

147. The achievements of pupils in Key Stage 3 are generally satisfactory and are good for the higher attainers. They are best when pupils use computers to communicate information, due to the varied and frequent opportunities that they have to develop and consolidate their capability in this aspect in the various subjects of the curriculum. However, the absence of a discrete information and communications technology course in this key stage, in which underlying skills in all aspects could be put in place, limits the overall achievement of many pupils. Those who take the GCSE course in Key Stage 4 achieve well in all aspects. Others achieve to a generally satisfactory level in subject based work, with the best aspect again being communicating information.

148. Attitudes of pupils are good. They clearly enjoy working with computers and are motivated to focus well and maintain a good work rate. They are willing to help each other, co-operate well in pairs and groups and respond well to questions. High attainers ask intelligent questions to ensure that they fully understand instructions and procedures. Behaviour is never poor, although in one or two lessons, the normally high standards were not achieved. In these lessons, pupils concentrated less well, spent some of the time chatting about matters not related to their work and did not pay full attention when teachers were giving instructions.

149. The quality of teaching was good in Key Stage 3 lessons; on one occasion it was excellent. In Key Stage 4, the overall quality was satisfactory, although good in some work observed. In both key stages, teachers gave good feedback on previous work and indicated ways of improving. Activities and procedures were explained well and instructions given clearly. Teachers displayed high expectations by encouraging pupils to use appropriate vocabulary and apply good practice in their working procedures. Many teachers of other subjects are aware of the value of computers and choose to use them in their lessons to enhance learning. For example, in a religious education lesson, lower attaining pupils, not normally highly motivated by writing tasks, enthusiastically created wordprocessed personal creeds. In one Year 9 music lesson, the subject context contributed particularly well to ICT capability. Work in creating and recording multi-track pieces, using composing software and electronic keyboards, in which groups of girls collaborated in experimenting with, testing and refining their ideas, provided excellent opportunities to achieve high levels in the control and modelling aspects. While strengths outweighed weaknesses, there were occasional lessons in which teachers spent too much time outlining work, so that the concentration of pupils declined. While control of pupils is generally at least satisfactory, teachers sometimes fail to ensure full attention when talking to the whole class and there were occasions when they failed to prevent inappropriate activities, such as eating or drinking from cans while using computers.

150. Pupils have regular opportunities to use computers in mathematics lessons, which supports the development of numeracy skills and skills, such as the use of spreadsheets, are taught in information technology lessons. A wide range of contexts are provided for pupils to reinforce literacy skills by using wordprocessors and desktop publishers.

151. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good, although many developments are quite recent and their full impact has not yet been felt. Standards in GCSE have improved significantly. A large number of departments, including science, mathematics, design technology, music, history and geography, plan computer-based activities and assess ICT capability in these. Pupils' experiences are now being mapped, so that the school is in a better position to ensure consistency across the curriculum and a full range of opportunities for all pupils in all aspects of ICT. However, the lack of opportunities for pupils to reflect upon their use of computers and to consider the implications of the development of the new technologies has yet to be addressed. Leadership and management of ICT are good and have improved considerably, so that the school's broad aims for its development have now been translated into specific tasks and significant steps towards achieving these have now been taken. Good assessment procedures for monitoring, recording and reporting pupils' progress

are being developed, including teacher-moderated self assessment and the use of software that will make high quality information easily accessible to all teachers. The level and quality of provision of resources such as computers, scanners and the Internet have improved significantly and a coherent plan now exists for their continued development. The school is about to utilise New Opportunities funding to equip all teachers with the skills to use computers well to support the teaching of their subjects.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

152. Results in the teacher assessments for modern foreign languages at the end of Key Stage 3 show pupils achieving levels that were above national averages.

French

153. Current attainment is above national expectations by the end of Key Stage 3. Higher attaining pupils use past, present and future tense fluently and incorporate colloquial phrases into writing and speech. Average and lower attaining pupils describe their rooms in the present tense using a variety of suitable adjectives. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, achieve well.

154. Pupils' results in the 1999 GCSE examinations were above national averages, but below average for similar schools. In comparison with national averages and averages for similar schools, the proportion of pupils obtaining A* and A grades was high but almost twice the number of candidates gained E grades and below. Over the past three years, results at GCSE have declined, although they were very high in 1998, when the percentage of girls attaining A* – C passes was higher both than national averages and when compared with similar schools. Attainment in the current Year 10 is in line with national expectations. Higher attaining pupils prepare interesting oral topics using a range of tenses and vocabulary; average attaining pupils produce comprehensible phrases but are not extending their work into more lengthy paragraphs; lower attaining pupils complete series of exercises but are not yet using the language for themselves. Higher attaining pupils achieve well at Key Stage 4; some average and lower attaining pupils underachieve.

155. A-level results in 1999 were well above national averages. Standards in the current Year 12 are similarly high. Pupils incorporate new language confidently into their work and take risks with new structures when responding to the teacher's effective questioning.

German

156. By the end of Key Stage 3, pupils attain standards that are in line with expectations for second language study after two years of learning the language. GCSE results in 1999 were above national averages and in line with results in similar schools. Over the past three years, standards have remained fairly constant, although in 1998 they were well above national averages and averages for similar schools. Standards in the current Year 10 are in line with national expectations. A-level results were above national averages with a small entry and standards in the current Year 12 are in line with national averages with a similarly small cohort. Pupils answer questions confidently and improve their written work by building on the very thorough correction provided by the teacher.

Spanish

157. Attainment in Spanish by the end of Key Stage 3 is in line with expectations for a second language after two years of study. GCSE results for 1999 were above national averages but below average for similar schools. Over the past three years there has been a small improvement in standards. Current Year 10 pupils attain standards that are in line with national expectations. A-level results were in line with national averages in 1999; there is no Spanish group in Year 12.

Other aspects of all three languages

158. In Spanish and German, pupils achieve well for their abilities in Key Stages 3 and 4. GCSE results are depressed partly because girls sit the examination after four years' study rather than five, and partly because, in line with the school's ethos of choice and opportunity, there is open access to the second language at Key Stage 4 for those who have studied it. This results in groups containing a wide range of ability. The situation is exacerbated by the overuse of English by some teachers in Key Stage 4, which prevents pupils from developing the highest skills of listening and speaking. A-level students achieve well.

159. Teaching is sound overall with some weaknesses and a number of strengths. It was good in the sixth form in the few lessons observed, where constant reinforcement of previous learning, together with logical presentation of new work, results in high standards and good progress. Many teachers begin lessons by outlining their aims clearly, and occasionally they structure lessons in a way which encourages girls to use the language being taught. They have very good subject knowledge and most have good classroom control. In the best lessons, logical planning and careful preparation of a wide range of material ensured that pupils made measurable progress, exemplified in a Year 9 French lesson where higher attainers used the past tense accurately to talk about food and drink. Less successful lessons contained insufficient visual work, such as overhead transparencies, to support the use of the target language. Some teachers used inappropriate methods and styles of learning, particularly in Key Stage 4, which did not enthuse or motivate average and lower attaining pupils sufficiently and resulted in unsatisfactory progress. Learning is sound overall. It is good in Key Stage 3 in all three languages and in the sixth form. In Key Stage 4 it is good in Spanish, German and French in higher attaining groups but unsatisfactory for lower attainers.

160. All pupils study a language in Key Stages 3 and 4 with two-thirds offered a second language in Year 8. ICT is used effectively to extend and enhance learning and contributes to the excellent display in classrooms. Teachers pay appropriate attention to the development of literacy skills. There are timetabling difficulties in French with almost half of the Year 7 lessons occurring last lesson in the afternoon. Additionally, two-thirds of Year 7 groups have two teachers, which affects relationships at this crucial stage of learning the language. Management is sound overall. The head of department provides clear educational direction and teachers have a shared commitment to improving standards. There are weaknesses in monitoring and evaluation of teachers' performance, resulting in inconsistencies both within and between languages. For example, although teachers mark conscientiously, not every teacher is following departmental guidance and assessment is insufficiently linked to National Curriculum levels. Similarly, despite good schemes of work, some teachers rely too heavily on the textbook for support. There is insufficient detail in the development plan to guide the work of the department.

161. Since the last inspection a more creative approach to reading has been implemented, as seen in a Year 7 class where pupils re-interpreted their readers well by re-enacting the stories effectively in groups. There is now less support from classroom assistants, which is affecting the performance of lower attaining pupils. Overall progress has been just sound.

MUSIC

162. Attainment at GCSE level has been very high. Almost all the pupils who took the examinations in 1998 and 1999 achieved higher grades. For the current Year 10, as numbers opting for the subject were low, the GCSE course is being run outside the time-tabled week. At A-level, only small numbers follow the course. Results are in line with the school's expectations of the pupils and were very high in 1999, when all 6 candidates achieved A to C grades. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 was above national expectation in both the school's statutory assessment of the pupils' work and in work observed. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a good working knowledge of the elements of music prescribed in the National Curriculum. They compose and perform with assurance in a variety of styles and they have a secure knowledge of the relevant musical theory. For example, pupils could clap intricate rhythms characteristic of the samba, with very good control of pulse and rhythm. They understood syncopation and could combine rhythmic and melodic ideas securely in whole-class ensembles. Higher attaining pupils used orchestral instruments effectively in these ensembles. All pupils had a good knowledge of the origins of this style of music and could analyse recordings of Latin American music using appropriate technical vocabulary. Pupils with special educational needs take part productively in all practical

activities. Attainment amongst the small number of pupils in Year 12 is well in line with each pupil's aptitude in all aspects of the course. Pupils' performing skills are good and reveal a good understanding of musical style. Composing is at an early stage. Most have a good understanding of harmony and texture, but the ability to exploit the characteristics of the instruments for which they write is underdeveloped.

163. Pupils have positive attitudes to music in Key Stage 3. They listen attentively to instructions, take appropriate care with the equipment they use, and show a good level of interest in the tasks they undertake. Pupils collaborate well when working independently in small groups, and are trustworthy when working dispersed and not directly supervised. They enjoy each other's performances and assess them constructively. Sixth form musicians are very dedicated and enthusiastic students.

164. Teaching observed was good in Key Stage 3, ranging in individual lessons from satisfactory to excellent, and pupils' progress closely reflects the quality of teaching and their positive approach to learning. Lower attaining pupils generally make good progress in lessons and benefit from the level of individual support provided by the class teacher. Topics are carefully chosen to interest pupils and the good range and quantity of resources strongly stimulate the pupils' imagination and interest. Teachers are very knowledgeable, give clear instructions and organise equipment efficiently. They communicate their own enthusiasm well and use their considerable musical skills effectively to promote the pupils' learning. Pupils made excellent progress in a lesson observed in Year 8 in a composing activity based on Indian ragas. The teacher recalled information from a previous lesson with brisk question-and-answer and provided pupils with information sheets of high quality. The pupils were gradually challenged more, with helpful demonstrations, and girls were enabled to compose and improvise to a very high standard. The lesson proceeded at an excellent pace and thoroughly engrossed the class. Some potentially very good lessons fell short of expectations because the pace of work was too slow, the teacher intervened too much, and underestimated the abilities of the pupils. Teaching in the small number of lessons observed in Year 12 was good. Teachers have a high level of technical knowledge and provide carefully targeted individual assistance.

165. The department is well organised on a day-to-day basis. The content of the scheme of work reflects statutory requirements well in Key Stage 3. However, teaching methods are not clearly specified in the planning and the teachers do not share their strengths sufficiently with each other; there is no formal monitoring of teaching. Assessment is not used enough as a means of raising standards. Some written tasks are too time-consuming and not clearly enough related to musical objectives. Uncritical marking reduces the otherwise positive impact of written work on the pupils' standards of literacy. The department's handbook is in need of a thorough revision to reflect current practice and to guide staff in more detail. Currently, no schemes of work for GCSE and A-level are available. The quality and range of resources have a positive impact on pupils' progress, as does the extensive and attractive accommodation.

166. A large number of pupils learn instruments from visiting tutors. This provision is well managed. There is a very wide range of extra-curricular activities that cater for pupils of all levels of musical accomplishment. The school mounts many choral and instrumental events in the course of a year and ensembles give regular performances in school and in the local community. This provision is a strength of the school. The department provides many worthwhile opportunities for the social and cultural development of pupils, including opportunities to study a good range of music from different world cultures. Opportunities for appraising music in Key Stage 3 are better than at the time of the previous inspection. Procedures for assessing pupils' progress have not developed to the extent recommended. Overall progress has been sound.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

167. The standards achieved by pupils in Key Stage 3 overall in the activities seen were at the level expected nationally. In some activities standards were above this level, for example rounders and shot put, but tennis skills were underdeveloped. Throughout the key stage pupils showed a sound understanding of the principles of play and teamwork and their skills in evaluating their work were developing well. This represents a good improvement since the last inspection when these aspects were said to be poor.

168. Physical education GCSE results in 1999 were well below the national average. This was caused, in part, by staffing problems. At present in Year 10 at GCSE, pupils show above average knowledge and understanding in their theory work. However, in the small amount of practical work seen in Key Stage 4, pupils demonstrated below average attainment in most activities. In dance, the GCSE results in 1999 were well above the national average and it was clear from video evidence of practical work that pupils attained good standards. The raising of overall standards of attainment in Key Stage 4 is seriously hampered by a shortfall in timetabled time in Year 10.

169. In the sixth form, AS-level dance and A-level physical education are offered but as numbers are small it is not reasonable to make national comparisons. Current standards of attainment in theory work in Year 12 were above national expectations and in practical work were average. There is no timetabled provision for physical education generally in the sixth form. This has a detrimental effect on the pupils' learning that exercise is important throughout life as part of a healthy lifestyle.

170. Overall, attainment and achievement in physical education at the end of Key Stage 3 was sound. In Key Stage 4 it was unsatisfactory and this was clearly as a result of the lack of sufficient timetabled curriculum time. Sixth form achievement is also unsatisfactory for similar reasons. This represents a backward step since the last inspection.

171. The overall judgement of the quality of the teaching is that it was good in all key stages with several points of excellence. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and skills. In just under half the lessons seen teaching was very good or excellent. This was reflected in the good progress being made by the pupils in lessons. Criteria for achievement were shared with pupils at the start of every lesson and the learning evaluated at the end. This is a good improvement since the previous report. Frequent opportunities were given to pupils in all year groups to take responsibility for their work but fewer opportunities were given to actually plan work. In an example of excellent practice in a Year 7 lesson, the girls were asked to run, when carrying out sprinting practice, using different poor techniques, for example waving their arms about. This led to great enjoyment, enthusiastic participation and excellent progress in appreciating sprinting skills.

172. Leadership of the department is good and is having a marked impact on the work. Monitoring of lessons and the effectiveness of the curriculum has already taken place in Key Stage 3, and an evaluation of the curriculum in Key Stage 4 in the light of the new National Curriculum Orders has resulted in the decision to pilot a new programme in September 2000. This is good practice, making very effective use of monitoring information. The curriculum meets statutory requirements at Key Stage 3 but cannot do so in Key Stage 4 in the time allocated and standards of attainment are adversely affected. The very good range of extra curricular activities in a good range of sports is appreciated by the girls who participate enthusiastically and in good numbers. Several girls go on to represent their county and achieve considerable success.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

173. Pupils in Key Stage 4 take the GCSE 'short' course in religious education. Figures for national comparison are not available, but results were very high both in 1999, when 83% gained A* to C grades, and in 1998, when 77% gained these grades. Most pupils work towards GCSE accreditation, but some, for whom the full course is considered inappropriately demanding, study to gain a Certificate of Achievement. Results are good at A-level. All candidates gained higher grades in 1999, while, in 1998, about half did.

174. Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 is above the expectations of the locally Agreed Syllabus. By the end of Year 9, all pupils have gained wide knowledge of the Christian faith. They have studied the life of Jesus and basic Christian beliefs, and are familiar with parables and miracles from the Bible. They understand that different faiths offer different beliefs. They know, for example, the Hindu theory of Creation and elements of Islamic and Buddhist thinking, such as the Eightfold Path to Enlightenment. They understand symbolism, for example as represented by the constituent parts of the Jewish Passover meal, and rites of passage, such as the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. They also receive an introduction to the philosophy of religion and consider, for example, why God allows suffering. Written work is of a good standard, carefully expressed and well presented.

175. Carefully targeted teaching enables pupils of all abilities to achieve very well and attain at least in line with expectation and usually above. Attainment in the small number of lessons observed in Year 10 was good. Pupils gained precise knowledge when learning about different stages in the life of Hindus. They understood the belief of reincarnation and the effect of conduct in one life with status in the next. They showed good recall and understanding of relevant Hindu vocabulary, such as Karma and Samskara. In Year 12, students showed a precise knowledge of the kinds of miracles performed by Jesus and are proficient at analysing and comparing texts.

176. Pupils' attitudes to religious education are positive. They ask and answer questions readily. They generally listen well to the teacher and to each other and are prepared to consider views other than their own. Written work is tackled with care. They work well individually and collaborate purposefully in small groups.

177. Teaching is very good overall and sometimes excellent. Teachers communicate their enthusiasm well to pupils and they have extensive and secure knowledge. Relationships between pupils and staff are very good. Teachers plan lessons carefully and use appropriate and interesting resources, such as an Islamic alarm clock and authentic prayer mats. Time is carefully allocated to tasks to ensure a good pace of learning, within well-structured lessons. Question-and-answer is used frequently to recall a topic and establish a good pace of learning. Teachers consolidate pupils' learning with recall of the substance of the lesson at the end, and they use the board well to help pupils absorb facts and learn correct spelling. Many lessons are very challenging, especially in Year 9, where high standards of debate are encouraged, enabling pupils of all levels of attainment to make good progress. Written work is well used to extend pupils' understanding and not merely to restate facts. Good examples were a letter to a friend about Jewish rituals when celebrating the Shabbat, and a play script about Muhammad. The grouping arrangements for pupils, in bands of ability, enable lessons to be taught at an appropriate level for all. Lower attaining pupils are well supported by the teachers and make good progress. Staff pay good attention to the specific needs detailed in the individual education plans of pupils with special educational needs. In-class support staff are purposeful and effective in their interventions.

178. The subject is well led and organised by a part-time head of department. Religious education follows the policies of the humanities faculty. There is no formal monitoring of teaching, but regular informal consultations assist in the sharing of good practice. Resources of books and artefacts are good and enhance the pupils' learning. Procedures for marking are outlined in the front of pupils' exercise books. In practice, the marking seen in Key Stage 3 was not detailed and did not always extend to the correcting of key words. However, the good standard of written work makes a positive contribution to the pupils' development of literacy. The use of ICT is being purposefully developed. Pupils produce carefully prepared work often using computers. Firm plans exist for information technology to be used more extensively. The scheme of work reflects well the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus. The department has maintained and developed the good work and achievements referred to in the last report.

OTHER SUBJECTS

Drama

179. In 1999, results in GCSE drama were well above the national average with 85% of students entered gaining grades A* - C. A-level results in 1999 were also good with 74% of the entry achieving A and B grades. Attainment by the majority of pupils at the end of Key Stage 3 is at least satisfactory, good at the end of Year 10, and very good in the sixth form. Most pupils at all levels of attainment make good or very good progress. A clearly structured Key Stage 3 programme culminates in a drama festival in the summer term. This allows pupils to use and reinforce their knowledge of techniques such as freeze frame, hot seating, dramatic irony and flashbacks. Lessons seen were generally well paced and engaged pupils' interest with a variety of tasks.

180. Girls' attitudes and behaviour were very good. Lessons taught by specialists were particularly challenging and effective. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 who study Latin do not have the same opportunities as their peers to study drama. This unsatisfactory situation is under review.

181. Enthusiasm for the subject was a hallmark of work seen in Year 10. The majority of pupils offered a confident and articulate oral response, were well-motivated and exhibited sustained concentration. Even the less confident made satisfactory progress and were enabled to contribute by sensitive encouragement. Small numbers in Year 12 limit some learning activities, but this was compensated for by the high quality of the interaction which took place in lessons. In both Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, theory work formed a rather too brief finale to the lessons seen. In one or two lessons pupils left early to travel between sites, which is unsatisfactory.

182. The department makes a significant contribution to the personal development of pupils. Opportunities to consider moral issues, to work collaboratively and to experience their own and other cultures through texts, productions and a wide range of extra-curricular activities, are extensive. Management of the department is generally effective although the departmental handbook needs revision and reorganisation, and lacks a clear, structured approach to monitoring, evaluation and review. The department is insufficiently involved in the schools' development planning process.

Media Studies

183. Results in GCSE in 1999 were high with over 80% achieving grades A*-C and also at A-level where all pupils achieved a grade A, B or C. The results have been consistently high for the last three years. Media studies is rapidly gaining in popularity in the school and many boys from the neighbouring school join for this particular A-level course. Few lessons were seen during the inspection, but pupils' work showed thorough intellectual criticism and creative flair. Short video films made by pupils on a particular genre were outstanding. The teaching was very good, the result of enthusiastic individual effort rather than team cohesion, particularly at A-level, where it is supported by excellent resources including digital video equipment, a video editing room, a sound recording room and invaluable technician support.

Vocational Education

184. Vocational courses are offered in Year 10, where a Part 1 GNVQ foundation course is offered in health and social care, and in the sixth form where vocational options include GNVQ courses in health and social care and leisure and tourism. A popular two-year BTEC National course in early childhood studies is also available in the sixth form. Although the Year 10 course is new and no examination results are available, results in the other vocational areas are very good and completion rates are well above national expectations. In the few post-16 vocational course lessons seen during the inspection, the quality of teaching was good. Teachers displayed good subject knowledge and a very good understanding of the assessment procedures. The courses are well planned to provide additional opportunities for a range of students to gain examination success, thereby enhancing their employment potential. A particularly good feature of the vocational courses was the arrangement made for the teaching of key skills. Good emphasis is placed on literacy and communication. In addition, opportunities for students to develop their use of number and their information technology skills are suitably planned. Overall, the provision made for vocational education is good.

185. Standards in **other courses** such as A-level business, sociology and psychology are above or well above average. Present Year 12 A-level and vocational pupils are making good progress, achieving good standards. A major factor contributing to the high levels of attainment is the quality of teaching.