

INSPECTION REPORT

ST PAUL'S SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Edgbaston, Birmingham

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103531

Headteacher: Miss Angela Whelan

Reporting inspector: Dr K C Thomas
3390

Dates of inspection: 20 - 23 January 2003

Inspection number: 249606

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

© Crown copyright 2003

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 11 to 19 years

Gender of pupils: Female

School address: Vernon Road
Edgbaston
Birmingham

Postcode: B16 9SL

Telephone number: 0121 4540895

Fax number: 0121 4564803

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mrs Mary Browning

Date of previous inspection: 29 September 1997

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities (sixth form)	Aspect responsibilities (sixth form)
3390	Kenneth Thomas	Registered inspector	Special educational needs	<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>How high are standards?</p> <p>a) The school's results and achievements</p> <p>How well are pupils taught?</p> <p>How well is the school led and managed?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p>
10329	Brian Sampson	Lay inspector		<p>How high are standards?</p> <p>b) Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p>
10905	Alan Brewerton	Team inspector	Biology	
25377	Lorna Brown	Team inspector	Art	
14704	Jeffrey Cooling	Team inspector		
19414	Janet Flisher	Team inspector	English as an additional language English	
2597	Cheryl Jackson	Team inspector	Health and social care	
11548	David Lee	Team inspector	Mathematics	<p>How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p>
8052	Kenneth McKenzie	Team inspector	Business education	

19152	Richard Merryfield	Team inspector	History Sociology	
17404	Judith Tolley	Team inspector	French	

The inspection contractor was:

Cambridge Education Associates Ltd

Demeter House
Station Road
Cambridge
CB1 2RS

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be raised with the inspection contractor. Complaints that are not satisfactorily resolved by the contractor should be raised with OFSTED by writing to:

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

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	7
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
 ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM	
 PART B: COMMENTARY	
 WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL	15
 WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED	20
 WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?	21
 PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS	22
 PART D: THE SIXTH FORM	28
 RESULTS AND STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS	28
 STUDENTS' ATTITUDES, VALUES AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT	29
 TEACHING AND LEARNING	30
 CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS	31
 THE SCHOOL'S CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS	33
 THE EFFECTIVENESS OF LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT IN THE SIXTH FORM	34
 PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	37

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Paul's School for Girls is an 11-18 comprehensive school and, with 804 pupils in the main school and 163 students in the sixth form, is about the same size as most other secondary schools. The school provides for pupils across the ability range, though attainment on entry is above average, overall. The proportions of pupils with special educational needs and with statements are below average. Most of the statements are for profound and multiple learning difficulties. Other pupils with the highest levels of need mostly have moderate learning, specific learning (dyslexia), or emotional and behavioural difficulties. Almost half the pupils are from minority ethnic backgrounds. This is more than in most schools. The school population reflects the diversity and richness of local communities: the largest single group is of Irish family background. While many pupils are bilingual, almost none are at an early stage of learning to speak English. The most frequently spoken home languages, other than English, are Urdu, Vietnamese and Panjabi. The proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals is within the average range.

The school is situated in Edgbaston and has provided Catholic education in Birmingham for almost 100 years. The catchment area is wide and pupils are drawn from any of the fifty-six Catholic primary schools in the city and beyond. The school became a Beacon School in September 1999 and this status has recently been renewed.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is an excellent school. Good and much very good teaching is promoting very good achievement and well above average standards in national tests and external examinations. The leadership and management team of the school is highly effective and provided with very good support by the governing body. They have successfully created a distinctive school ethos in which there are shared values and careful attention is given to the all round development of pupils. Responsibilities for social inclusion are taken very seriously and staff work hard to ensure that all pupils can participate in all that the school provides. Resources are very well managed and the school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Pupils achieve very well. Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are well above average and very high in comparison with similar schools.
- Teaching is good and much is very good, enabling pupils to learn very well.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Relationships among pupils and between pupils and teachers are also excellent.
- Pupils' achievement is underpinned by excellent academic and personal support and guidance.
- Excellent provision for spiritual and moral development provides pupils with a securely based value system, and makes a significant contribution to their personal development.
- Excellent leadership, with strong support from governors, ensures that the school has a distinctive ethos in which pupils are provided with a high quality education.

What could be improved

- Aspects of the accommodation.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good progress since the last inspection 1997. The overall good quality of teaching has helped both to maintain well above average standards and to show a year on year improvement in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations. Parents recognise the school's strengths and continued improvement and there is a high demand for places. The school has systematically tackled the key issues for action identified in the last report. Good progress has been made in the development of teaching and learning. There is now more use of enquiry methods in sixth form teaching and greater attention is paid to the needs of pupils across the attainment range in the main school. The use of assessment information for target setting, monitoring and evaluation has improved to the extent that it is now a strength, and provides the school with a clear understanding of the value being added as pupils progress through the school. Particularly good progress has been made in the analysis of the performance of different groups of pupils to ensure that there is no underachievement. The objectives set in the school improvement plan are clear and measurable. The school has worked very hard to improve the quality of the accommodation and substantial internal improvement has been made. However, more is still needed. The accommodation offered by the temporary buildings is poor and aspects of the accommodation for art, history, sociology, business studies and physical education are unsatisfactory. The school recognizes these weaknesses and is striving hard to secure funding to rectify them.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 and sixth form students at the end of Year 13 based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A*
A-levels/AS-levels	C	C	-	

Key

very high A
 well above *
 average A
 above average B
 average C
 below average D
 well below E
 average

From entry to the school in Year 7, girls of all social groups and academic potential make very good progress and achieve well. In the National Curriculum tests, they have consistently attained well above average standards in the three subjects tested, English, mathematics and science, in comparison with all and similar schools. In 2002, the results were well above average and in the highest five per cent of schools in similar socio-economic circumstances.

Pupils' very good progress continues through Years 10 and 11 and this is reflected in the results of GCSE examinations taken at the end of Year 11, which are regularly well above average. In 2002, the proportion of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades and the GCSE average points score were well above average in comparison with all schools and in the highest five per cent of schools in similar socio-economic circumstances. The very good achievement of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic backgrounds, is seen in the GCSE average point score, which reflects attainment across the whole grade range. The 2002 results were well above average in almost all subjects. Only in art and information and communication technology (ICT) were results below average.

The trend in results in National Curriculum tests and in GCSE examinations has been at the national rate of improvement for the last five years, but standards have been consistently well above the national average. The targets set by the school to be achieved in tests and examinations are set precisely and were met almost exactly in 2002.

Inspection evidence shows the standards of work of pupils presently in Years 7 to 11 to be well above average and consistent with the results obtained in external tests and examinations.

During the period from 1999 to 2001, overall A-level results were adversely affected by extended periods of teacher absence through ill health. Although the results in both 2000 and 2001 were average in comparison with all sixth forms, they were below the results obtained in 1999. However, action taken by the school had a marked effect on the 2002 A-level results, which show improvement in almost all subjects. All students obtained passes in the A to E range in art, biology, business studies, English literature, French, general studies, history, physics and sociology and there was a significant rise in the number of students obtaining the higher A or B grades in chemistry, English literature, French, geography, general studies, mathematics, physics and sociology. Year 12 students achieved well in AS level examinations in 2002. Almost all passed the examination and nearly half gained grades A or B. Students were able to continue to study at A-level with confidence.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Pupils' attitudes to learning are excellent. Their enthusiasm for learning makes a significant contribution to the very good progress they are making.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. Pupils are very courteous, keen to be helpful to visitors and show much respect to each other and to their teachers.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships and personal development are excellent. Pupils develop well as independent learners and thinkers. They show initiative and are willing to take responsibility.
Attendance	Attendance is very good in comparison with national averages.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Very Good	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.

Teaching is good and much is of very good quality in Years 7 to 11. In the sixth form, it is very good. There are examples of excellence in teaching in all years. The school provides very well for the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and those from minority ethnic backgrounds. It ensures that pupils learn successfully and achieve well. The teaching of science is good and the teaching of English and mathematics is very good. Literacy and numeracy are well taught with appropriate emphasis in all subjects. Teachers expect pupils to achieve their best and they do so by responding very well to the good teaching, and much very good teaching, that they receive. Teachers manage their classes very well with the help of the respect that arises from excellent relationships. Pupils learn successfully by working hard, concentrating in class and consulting their teachers freely when they need help.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. Pupils have a very good choice of subjects in Years 10 and 11. The range of extra-curricular opportunities is good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Effective support enables pupils to achieve well. Very good support with reading for pupils in Years 7 and 8 considerably assists their understanding and progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good provision for pupils with English as an additional language ensures that their progress and achievement are comparable to their peers.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Excellent. Concern for the spiritual and moral development of pupils permeates the total life of the school and has a significant impact on their achievement and personal development.

How well the school cares for its pupils	The excellent academic and personal support the school provides are important factors in pupils' academic success and the highly positive way in which they respond to what the school has to offer.
--	--

The school provides a very good range of subjects for its pupils and they achieve well. The school has extended the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 to provide alternative programmes for pupils less suited to GCSE courses. This provision includes a very good vocational skills programme. Particularly effective use is made of assessment information to monitor and support pupils' progress, including the monitoring of the progress of different groups of pupils. A good range of extra-curricular activities enhances pupils' educational experiences and increases their achievement opportunities. Extended periods of teacher absence through illness have had an adverse impact on curriculum provision in physical education. Curriculum provision for pupils with special educational needs is good. They receive very good support and achieve well. Curriculum provision complies with all statutory requirements.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent. The headteacher and senior leadership team provide a clear vision for the future development of the school. School management is very effective.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governing body is very effective. Governors work closely with the school. They ensure there is a clear sense of direction and that there is a climate in which all can achieve.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The school applies rigorous systems to evaluate its performance. As a result senior managers and governors have an excellent picture of the school's strengths and weaknesses. All results are carefully analysed and used to set targets for further improvement.
The strategic use of resources	Resources are used very well. The school seeks best value when making spending decisions and the educational outcomes of such decisions are evaluated.

Leadership of the school is highly effective and staff at all levels have an exceptionally strong commitment to the school and its pupils. Rigorous monitoring of the school's work has brought about sustained improvement since the last inspection. The school is developing well as a self-evaluating organisation and the enthusiasm of both staff and pupils for learning make this a lively learning community. Governors and senior managers have a clear grasp of the school's strengths and weaknesses. Financial planning is very good. External grants and other resources are used efficiently and best value principles are applied to all spending. There is a general shortage of teaching space and several teaching rooms are too small for the number of pupils they accommodate. The accommodation provided in the mobile classrooms is poor and has an adverse effect on teaching and learning, particularly in English and mathematics. Both the indoor and outdoor facilities for physical education are inadequate.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The school has high expectations of their children and is enabling them to be mature and responsible. • The good progress their children are making • They think that teaching and behaviour are good. • They think that leadership is very good, especially that of the headteacher. • They are happy to approach the school with problems. • Their children like school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The range of extra-curricular activities. • More information on progress. • The school to work more closely with them. • Homework.

An exceptionally high number of parents, over 80 per cent, returned the pre-inspection questionnaire. Their responses were overwhelmingly positive and confirm the high degree of parental support for the school. Inspectors agree with all of their positive comments. However, they do not agree with the criticisms of some parents. Clear information on pupils' progress is provided through informative reports and parents' evenings. The school works well with parents, and responds readily to their concerns. During the inspection, homework was set regularly and was usually interesting and challenging so that students could extend their learning well. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form comprises 163 students. It is about the same size as most other sixth forms and the number of students has increased since 1997. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals is similar to that in the main school. The proportion of students who choose to continue in full-time education at age 16 is above average and about half choose to stay on into the sixth form. Some of the students who leave to continue their education in other institutions are amongst the highest attainers at the end of Year 11. A number students, from mainly minority ethnic backgrounds, join the sixth form at the age of 16 from other schools in the Birmingham area. There are 26 students of minority ethnic background in the sixth form, mostly of Pakistani family background, and 35 students with English as an additional language. Students are offered a range of 15 Advanced Supplementary (AS) and Advanced level (A-level) courses, together with one AVCE and two GNVQ courses. The minimum entry requirements for admission to sixth form courses vary according to the intended programmes of study. The minimum entry requirements are on a sliding scale from six GCSE B grades for students wishing to study four AS level subjects to six GCSE grade C passes for students wishing to study two AS level subjects. The minimum entry requirement for students intending to take the Intermediate Vocational award is a range of GCSE grade D passes. The school works closely with other post-16 education providers to extend the range of options available to students.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form meets the needs of the vast majority of students very well. It enables them to attain standards that are above average, overall. A downward trend in the A-level results, from well above average in 1999 to average in 2001, has been arrested and results rose significantly in 2002. Teaching and learning are very good, and accommodation and subject resources have improved, although more needs to be done to improve the teaching accommodation. Students achieve very well and the quality of education is very good. Excellent leadership and management ensure that provision is highly cost-effective.

Strengths

- Very good teaching leads to students achieving very well.
- Students' attitudes and behaviour are excellent.
- Provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent and permeates all aspects of life in the sixth form.
- The care, support and guidance students receive contributes significantly to their personal development.
- Students' personal development is underpinned by a shared value system and a firm commitment to the welfare and needs of others.

What could be improved

- Aspects of the accommodation.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. Strengths and areas for improvement in individual subjects are identified in the sections on individual subjects in the full report.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

The table below shows overall judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses that were inspected in the sixth form. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Good. Teaching is good and students achieve well in lessons. A-level results were below average in 2001 but rose sharply in 2002. Students achieve well because they receive very good support from their teachers.
Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Biology	Good. The A-level examination results were well above average in 2001. Although they were not as high in 2002, the results represented satisfactory achievement as a result of good teaching and learning.
Business Studies	Very good. Although results fell in 2002, they were well above average in 2001. As a result of very good teaching and learning students are making very good progress.
Health and Social Care	Satisfactory. Results are in line with the national average and represent satisfactory achievement in relation to students' prior achievement. Teaching and learning are satisfactory.
Art and Design	Very good. Standards are well above national averages and represent very good achievement. Very good teaching enables students to take responsibility for their own learning.
History	Very good. The overall pass rates in A-level examinations have been above average. Students are very well taught and achieve well. Very good support results in very good learning.
Sociology	Very good. The 2002 results show a rise on the results obtained in 2001, when they were well above average. Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve well.
English	Very good. Students achieve well and attain standards that are well above average. This is the result of enthusiastic and focused teaching and a high level of commitment on the part of students.
French	Satisfactory. Standards attained are below average but this represents satisfactory achievement in relation to prior attainment and is a result of satisfactory teaching and learning.

In other courses the standard of teaching was at least satisfactory and more often good or better, enabling students to achieve well. Some very good teaching, enabling students to achieve very well, was seen, especially in physics and geography.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The school provides very good care and support for students. Staff know students very well as individuals and relationships are excellent. Students receive very good guidance in relation to their academic progress and advice on university entrance is excellent.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Overall leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. The head of sixth form and sixth form tutors ensure that day-to-day administration is very effective. The strategic direction of the sixth form is clear and shared by staff, students, parents and governors.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Good teaching. • The help provided if they have difficulties with their work. • The encouragement to work independently. • The choice of courses. • Thorough assessment helps them to see how they can improve their work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Extra-curricular activities. • The support available if they have personal problems. • Their views being listened to more. • Advice on what they should do after school.

Inspectors support the positive views expressed by the students. The vast majority of the students are very positive about the sixth form. The inspection team could find little evidence to support students' opinion that the advice and guidance they receive prior to entry into the sixth and in respect of opportunities after they leave the sixth form, were insufficient. Indeed, students interviewed during the week strongly contradicted these opinions. Students and parents are provided with detailed information on the opportunities the sixth form offers through the prospectus and consultation process. In the opinion of the inspectors, careers education and guidance is very good. The arrangements for personal support and guidance of students and students' access to sixth form tutors are strengths of this impressive sixth form. The range of extra-curricular activities is good, although the provision of extra-curricular sporting activities has been adversely affected by extended periods of teacher absence through illness.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership and management, in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement "outstanding" in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to "very weak".

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

Pupils achieve very well. Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are well above average and very high in comparison with similar schools.

1. Pupils of wide ranging levels of attainment and from all ethnic backgrounds achieve very well. The provision of equal opportunities for all to achieve what they should with the gifts and talents that they have is central to the mission of the school. The school strives hard to ensure that all pupils receive effective support to realise their potential.
2. National Curriculum tests taken in the last year of primary education, at the end of Year 6, show that pupils enter in Year 7 with standards of attainment that, although wide ranging, are above average overall. Pupils achieve very well at St Paul's and the overall results in National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 in English, mathematics and science have been consistently well above average since the last inspection and rising at a similar rate as results nationally. In 2002, the results were well above average in comparison with all schools and in the highest five per cent nationally in comparison with similar schools, based on pupils' entitlement to free school meals. Taking the standards of attainment of these pupils when they entered the school in Year 7 into account, the results represent good achievement by the end of Year 9. There have been differences in attainment between the three core subjects, with results in science tending to be more variable and slightly below those obtained in English and mathematics. However, when standards of attainment on entry are taken into account the results obtained in science represent slightly higher achievement than the results in English and mathematics.
3. Standards are well above average at the end of Year 11 and the school is remarkably successful in GCSE examinations. Results in the examinations have been consistently well above average both in comparison with all schools and similar schools. The maintenance of such high standards is very difficult to accomplish, but the trend in results has still been rising. In 2002, both the percentage of pupils gaining five or more A* to C grades and the average GCSE points score, which reflects pupils' attainment across the whole grade range, were well above average and in the top five per cent of similar schools nationally. Comparison of the results obtained by these pupils with the results they obtained in the National Curriculum tests taken at the end of Year 9 in 2000 shows that achievement was well above expectations.
4. In 2002, the GCSE examination results were well above national averages in almost all subjects. The percentage of pupils gaining A* to C grades was significantly above average in English language and literature, mathematics, science, design and technology, drama, French, German and geography, and above average in history. Only in art and ICT were results below average. Inspection evidence indicates that standards in art are now comparable to those in other subjects and that standards in ICT are rising.
5. Achievement in lessons is good and pupils attain standards that are well above average in almost all subjects. These standards are underpinned by very good standards of literacy and numeracy. The development of literacy skills is given a high profile in all

subjects and the examination of pupils' work shows that standards are well above average. Pupils have very good oral skills and communicate their viewpoints confidently and clearly. They are confident speakers and listen carefully during question and answer sessions, group work and discussion. Throughout Years 7 to 11, pupils are curious about their work and ask many questions to clarify their understanding and ideas.

6. Reading and comprehension skills are well above average and pupils read and interpret texts accurately and with understanding. By Year 11, pupils are able to apply high order reading skills in order to carry out research and investigation, in for example, English, science, geography, history and design and technology. Standards of written work are very good and writing is used for a variety of purposes in most subjects. Very good examples of creative writing are seen in English and pupils make thoughtful written evaluations in history, art and child development.
7. Work in the mathematics department lays the foundation for the development of pupils' numerical skills, which are well above average. Pupils have very good mathematical data-handling skills and very good number and calculation skills. They are able to apply their mathematical skills in other subjects. The regular practice of mental arithmetic skills in mathematics lessons helps pupils to work more efficiently when solving problems.
8. Standards are well above average because the school has established a culture within which success is valued and pupils of all abilities are willing to work hard to succeed. All school planning is sharply focused on continued improvement and this is underpinned by the enthusiasm of teachers to learn from and share ideas with others. Teachers are keen to engage in professional debate about learning and to implement strategies that promote more effective learning. Pupils' achievement is also promoted through the strategies the school has established to identify and prevent underachievement. Effective assessment and monitoring systems enable pupils who may be experiencing difficulties to be identified and additional support provided. These systems underpin the very good progress pupils are making. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well because of the very good support they receive. Because support is carefully planned to take account of individual needs their achievement is comparable to that of their peers. Very good support is also provided for pupils with English as an additional language with the result that their achievement is also comparable to that of their peers.

Teaching is good and much is very good, enabling pupils to learn very well.

9. One of the features of the school is the amount of thought that is given to teaching and learning. Teachers are keen to explore, share and implement new ideas. As a result, the predominantly good teaching noted in the last inspection report has improved even further, and there is more very good and excellent teaching. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11.
10. In Years 7 to 11 teaching is satisfactory or better in all lessons. It is good or better in 84 per cent of lessons and very good in 49 per cent of lessons. Teaching was judged to be excellent in 13 per cent of lessons. The quality of pupils' learning reflects the success

of teaching and this is directly linked to their very good achievement at the end of Year 11. The school is successful in meeting the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs, those from different ethnic backgrounds and those with English as an additional language.

11. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subjects, which underpins confident teaching. The very good use of display in classrooms also reflects the expertise of teachers and helps to create stimulating learning environments for pupils. Teachers' high expectations and very good control and management skills, help to create purposeful learning atmospheres in lessons. The sharing of good practice and willingness to implement different teaching methods are also leading to more varied and challenging teaching, particularly in Years 10 and 11, and having a positive effect on pupils' learning. Pupils respond well to these environments and the excellent relationships provide pupils with the confidence to contribute with enthusiasm to lesson activities. This can be seen in the best lessons in the consistency with which teachers challenge pupils to think. These lessons generally begin with rapid questioning to review previous learning, which captures pupils' interest and stimulates thoughtful responses. This was, for example, one of the features of the excellent teaching observed in a Year 7 history lesson and a Year 11 English lesson. Pupils are also challenged to think at the start of mathematics lessons by the use of mental arithmetic exercises. The impact of the National Key Stage 3 strategy can be seen in lessons throughout Years 7 to 9. Teachers provide clear explanations of learning objectives at the start of lessons and, in order to consolidate learning, review the progress made at the end. This practice helps pupils both to structure their learning in lessons and to place this learning within their developing knowledge and understanding of the subject as a whole. These are consistent features in the good and very good teaching observed in almost all subjects.
12. Teachers use a good range of strategies to enable pupils to learn and develop skills. Through paired and small-group work pupils develop the confidence to discuss issues and participate actively in the process of learning. The use of collaborative activities was more likely to be seen in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Very few lessons were seen in which pupils were not actively engaged in learning. The very effective use of a variety of teaching and learning strategies in science, for example, helps to maintain pupils' interest and motivation. This was seen in a Year 9 lesson where pupils gained a greater understanding of the materials that are best suited for an electrical cell through clear explanations and the opportunity for experimentation. Pupils work successfully in small groups when sharing equipment in design and technology, when devising movement sequences in physical education and when engaged in role-play in drama. Small-group work is also used effectively in English, mathematics, history and geography to discuss and extend pupils' thinking.
13. Teachers use the learning resources that are available to them well. Homework is used effectively to enable pupils to extend their learning. Homework is usually challenging and encourages pupils to work independently and gain further knowledge and understanding without direct supervision by the teacher.

Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Relationships among pupils and between pupils and teachers are also excellent.

14. Pupils' attitudes to school and learning are excellent and make a significant contribution to the very good progress they are making. In all lessons attitudes are good or better and in 90 per cent of lessons they are very good or excellent. Both pupils and parents are proud of St Paul's, and the excellent attitudes of pupils make a significant contribution to the general life of the school. The high commitment of parents and pupils to the school is seen in the distances that some pupils travel in order to attend St Paul's. Attendance is above average and even though many pupils leave home very early in the morning to travel to school they are punctual and lessons start on time.
15. The school provides a supportive and mutually respectful working environment in which pupils are well motivated and enjoy being challenged. This is seen in the best mathematics and science lessons, for example, where pupils enjoy the challenge of rapid starter activities at the beginning of lessons. Pupils are keen to do well and concentrate on the tasks set. They listen attentively and assimilate new information and ideas quickly. Pupils are keen to help each other in lessons and are considerate towards others who may be experiencing difficulties. They respond well to the enthusiasm of their teachers and are willing to check and improve their work, as in a Year 9 French lesson where pupils were working collaboratively on the translation of key phrases.
16. Pupils work well in pairs and groups, collaborating effectively and responding well when given the opportunity to show initiative. They make considerable efforts to succeed and by the time they are in Years 10 and 11, they are developing well as mature learners. This was seen in an excellent Year 11 English lesson, for example, where pupils demonstrated their ability to work effectively without close supervision by the teacher as they discussed the meaning, shape and structure of the poem 'Presents from my Aunt in Pakistan'.
17. The very good climate for learning is due to several factors, and especially to teachers' high expectations and the excellent relationships they establish. The high quality of the relationships is seen in most lessons and provides pupils with the confidence to ask questions and enables teachers to concentrate on teaching. This was seen, for example, in an excellent Year 7 music lesson where the pupils' enthusiastic response to vibrant and challenging teaching led to very good progress in learning. Pupils have many opportunities, individually and in groups, to review evidence and identify key facts, for example in geography and history. Their discussions strengthen both their understanding of the subject, and also their language skills. Pupils are willing to help each other to solve problems. This was seen, for example, in a Year 10 child development lesson where the sharing of ideas helped pupils to increase their knowledge and understanding of the benefits of healthy eating.
18. The excellent attitudes of pupils can also be seen in the way in which they respond to the school's high expectations of behaviour. These are clearly understood and behaviour is excellent. Pupils are very courteous, keen to be helpful to visitors and show much respect to each other and to their teachers. The school is a very orderly community and conduct around the school is very good as pupils move between lessons. This is particularly important when large numbers of pupils move along narrow corridors and stairways at lesson changeover times. The sensible behaviour of pupils helps to ensure safety at these times. Pupils show care for the school

environment, there is no evidence of any graffiti in the buildings and the main corridors remain litter free all day. Pupils queue patiently when waiting to enter the dining hall and when waiting to enter teaching rooms. Pupils respond well to the efforts made to support those with behaviour difficulties. Incidents of unacceptable behaviour, although very rare, are dealt with effectively. In the last school year fixed-period exclusions were well below average for a school of this size and there were no permanent exclusions. Pupils interviewed during the week of the inspection reported that they were unaware of any instances of bullying.

Pupils' achievement is underpinned by excellent academic and personal support and guidance.

19. The excellent academic and personal support the school provides for pupils are important factors, not only in the academic success that pupils achieve but also in the highly positive way in which they respond to what the school has to offer. The school is a caring institution, and concern for the care and support of pupils is central to its ethos. Care and support for pupils begin at the time of transfer from the many primary schools from which they are drawn. Pupils entering the school in Year 7 come from around 57 primary schools and several different local education authorities. Every effort is made to ensure that all pupils are well supported at this time. Parents and pupils alike say that the transfer arrangements are very effective and that the school has very good induction procedures for pupils and their parents.
20. Continuity in care is a feature of the school pastoral system, which is based on the role of form tutors and year heads, who develop a very good knowledge of individual pupils and their particular social and educational needs. Heads of year play an important role in ensuring continuity in care, and provide good support for form tutors. They meet regularly with the tutors to discuss and monitor individual pupils' academic and social progress. This knowledge underpins the school's provision for pupils' personal development, which is a strength of the school. Although the form tutor is the first point of contact with home, heads of year are also in close contact with parents when pupils need additional support. The 'School Diary' is an effective means of harnessing the support of parents in the day-to-day monitoring of homework, effort and behaviour. As a consequence, all pupils are provided with very good support as they move through the school. The quality of this provision makes a significant contribution to pupils' progress and achievement. The school's very good links with the careers service, local employers, further and higher education ensure continuity at the time pupils leave school.
21. A particular strength of the school is the attention paid to the analysis of examination and test results and the use of this information for target setting and monitoring pupils' progress. The system is based on the transfer of information from the primary schools. This information and information obtained through the school's own initial assessment procedures, is supplemented by the use of MIDYIS, a national data gathering and analysis system that provides reliable predictions about pupils' performance in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9. Effective use is then made of national pupil performance information, made available by the DfES through the 'Autumn Package', to predict pupils' performance in the GCSE examinations taken at the end of Year 11.

The school has rigorous procedures for monitoring pupils' progress towards their targets and pupils are left in no doubt about the progress they are making.

22. The monitoring and support provided by form tutors and subject teachers are supplemented by a system of review tutors. These tutors are responsible for reviewing the overall progress of a small number of pupils drawn from Years 7 to 11. Over the five years from Year 7 they develop a very good knowledge of the pupils for whom they are responsible and provide a very effective early warning system of any potential underachievement so that support can be provided. The value of this is that pastoral and curriculum teams can then work closely together to support pupils' progress. A very good example of the effectiveness of this system is seen in the school's 2002 GCSE results. Through the school's monitoring systems it became apparent when the pupils were in Year 10 that the performance of the year group was unlikely to reach that of the 2001 cohort. Pupils were provided with carefully structured additional support during Year 11 with the result that GCSE targets were exceeded and pupils' achievement was well

above expectations. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting were particularly appreciative of the support their children receive. They feel that the clarity of the information they receive gives them a good understanding of the progress their children are making.

Excellent provision for spiritual and moral development provides pupils with a securely based value system, and makes a significant contribution to their personal development.

23. At the forefront of the school's work is the all round development of pupils within a Catholic Christian framework. The school's mission statement expresses a clear commitment to assisting Catholic parents in giving their children a Catholic education so that they may lead happy and fulfilled lives, promote the common good of society and attain their eternal destiny. This commitment influences all of the school's activities and is much in evidence in the general school ethos. Pupils are educated in an environment based upon clear values and principles. These values and principles influence every aspect of school and pupils feel secure, valued and respected. There is clear recognition by the school that the spiritual and moral development of pupils has a vital impact on their progress, attitudes and achievement. This aspect of pupils' personal development is exceptionally well co-ordinated and there are numerous and valuable examples of opportunities for reflection and discussion of spiritual and moral issues in all curriculum areas.
24. Provision for pupils' spiritual development is excellent. The religious life of the school and religious education clearly play major and valuable parts in the development of spirituality. There is a thoughtful programme for assemblies and worship, which is centred on a theme for the week. During the week of the inspection the assemblies observed were excellent and provided pupils with a reflective and uplifting start to the day. Due to the lack of suitable accommodation it is not possible for all year groups to have a daily assembly. On the days when a year group does not have an assembly, pupils have prayers in their tutor groups. These occasions provide pupils with an appropriate opportunity for considered reflection, as does the observance of 'The Angelus' at noon each day. Pupils have opportunities to attend Mass, prayer and liturgy

groups and to participate in residential retreats. All subjects make significant contributions to pupils' spiritual development and there are strong links between spiritual themes and the planned curriculum. All teaching reflects the aims and mission of the school and so promotes pupils' spiritual development, and there are excellent examples of these values being promoted across the curriculum.

25. Provision for pupils' moral development is excellent. There is a clear framework of values, based on the religious principles of the school, which is reflected in the daily life of the community. The code of conduct is known to all pupils and regarded as fair and appropriate. Staff provide excellent role models and pupils understand what is expected of them in terms of behaviour and of respect and consideration for others. Moral issues are raised and discussed through a range of subjects and highlighted in assembly themes. The work covered in many subjects plays a significant part in the provision of moral development. Pupils are provided with numerous opportunities to study the religious impact on moral behaviour and to explore their own moral codes. One of the real strengths of this aspect of the school's provision is the encouragement pupils are given to question traditional beliefs and values. It is through this process that pupils gain a better understanding of the principles that underpin these beliefs and values. This helps them to form a more secure base for their own value systems.

Excellent leadership, with strong support from governors, ensures that the school has a distinctive ethos in which pupils are provided with a high quality education.

26. School leadership is excellent. The headteacher and the senior leadership provide the school a clear vision for its future development. One of the most striking features of senior leadership in the school is the absolute commitment to the school's mission statement. This statement, which places the all round education of pupils within a Catholic education framework, permeates all daily activities and guides all planning. As a result the school has a distinctive ethos in which pupils' academic and personal development, and in particular their spiritual and moral development, are mutually supportive. Staff are enthused by the excellent professional leadership the headteacher provides and the support they are given by the senior leadership team. As a result the school provides a well-ordered and stimulating learning environment in which pupils are prepared well for life in today's secular, multi-ethnic society. This finding is endorsed by the views expressed by parents, both at the pre-inspection meeting and through the parents' questionnaire. An exceptionally high number of parents, over 80 per cent, returned the questionnaire, 94 per cent of whom agreed with the statement that the school is well led and managed. Indeed, a further striking feature of the school is the high degree of support the school receives from parents. Parents know, understand and share the school's values and this makes a significant contribution to the success of the school.
27. The school has highly effective management systems that underpin its strategies for continued improvement. All members of the senior leadership team have clear line management responsibilities for subject departments, and meet with heads of department on a regular basis to review progress towards targets. The school's strategies for evaluating performance are excellent and underpin all improvement planning. Formal departmental reviews are well established and form part of the school's strategies for self-evaluation. They provide the senior leadership team and

others with leadership responsibilities, with a very clear picture of the school's strengths and areas for improvement. As a result, planning is very well organised, systematic and well focused on maintaining and improving standards.

28. Substantial progress has been made over the past four years in the collection and use of assessment information. The school has established a comprehensive database, and detailed analyses of assessment information are carried out. These analyses include examination of the performance of pupils with special educational needs, pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, those with English as an additional language and those entitled to free school meals. Exemplary use is made of this information to monitor both the performance of departments and the progress of pupils. This information is presented to heads of department, who are required to explain performance and to use the information in planning teaching and learning. The process is highly rigorous and enables the school to focus sharply on any areas of underperformance. One recent example of the effective use of assessment information has been in the successful implementation of strategies to ensure the maintenance of well above average performance in the 2002 GCSE examination. The school makes very effective use of target setting and monitoring to ensure that pupils achieve their best. Through these procedures the school is able to identify pupils who might be in danger of failing at an early stage and additional support provided. The use of assessment information in this way makes a significant contribution to pupils' achievement. Parents at the pre-inspection meeting were particularly appreciative of these procedures as they are provided with clear information on the standards that can be achieved and what needs to be done in order to ensure that the standards are achieved.
29. Governors have high expectations of the school and are conscientious in carrying out their responsibilities. The school made a vigorous response to the previous inspection report and has made good progress in overcoming the few weaknesses identified at that time. With the encouragement and support of the headteacher, governors are becoming more effective in questioning and supporting the work of the school and the departments to which they are attached. They are closely involved in budget planning and have a very good sense of best value in spending. All statutory requirements are met. Governors are vigilant about health and safety, and satisfactory arrangements are in place for child protection. They work very closely with the headteacher and senior staff, and are highly committed to helping the school to do its best for its pupils and parents. Non-teaching staff are also very committed to the pupils and the school community, and make a valuable contribution to the ethos of the school.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Aspects of the accommodation.

30. The popularity of the school is reflected in the rising numbers of pupils on the school roll and the increasing numbers of students in the sixth form. However, there is a general shortage of teaching space and several teaching rooms are too small for the number of pupils they accommodate. There is a lack of large communal areas and large teaching spaces and it is not possible to hold whole school assemblies. A number of specific weaknesses related to the accommodation were identified in the last inspection

report and the school has worked hard to tackle these. The accommodation for art and geography has been improved, although there are not enough sinks in the art rooms for larger teaching groups. However, the accommodation provided in the mobile classrooms is poor and has an adverse effect on teaching and learning, particularly in English and mathematics. Teachers make every effort to brighten these rooms with attractive displays and support staff work hard to maintain the rooms in reasonable condition. However, because rainwater penetrates the buildings the teaching rooms are often damp. This creates unacceptable conditions for teaching and learning. There are problems with the conservation of materials and the damp conditions do not allow the provision of ICT facilities in the rooms. The school has made repeated attempts to remove these classrooms and there are plans for the classrooms to be replaced by a new teaching block in the near future. The weaknesses in the accommodation for physical education remain. Both the indoor and outdoor facilities are inadequate.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

31. In order to improve the quality of education provided, the governors, senior leadership and staff of St Paul's School, with the help of the Local Education Authority, should:
 - (1) continue to press the case for improvement to the accommodation in line with the school improvement plan.

Sixth form

- (1) as for the main school.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	45
	Sixth form	33
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		57

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	6	16	16	7	0	0	0
Percentage	13	36	36	16	0	0	0
Sixth form							
Number	1	18	8	6	0	0	0
Percentage	3	55	24	18	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7 - 11 and the sixth form as each lesson represents more than two percentage points.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	804	163
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	129	-

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	11	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	108	21

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	58

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	13
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	18

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.1
National comparative data	7.8

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.2
National comparative data	1.0

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 9)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	0	166	166

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys			
	Girls	145	142	139
	Total	131	142	139
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	87 (93)	86 (83)	84 (88)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	60 (51)	64 (64)	36 (56)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys			
	Girls	139	136	140
	Total	142	135	139
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	84 (81)	82 (86)	84 (88)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	51 (42)	61 (59)	37 (55)
	National	32 (31)	44 (42)	34 (33)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	n/a	154	154

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			
	Girls	110	148	150
	Total	110	148	150
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	71 (67)	96 (97)	97 (98)
	National	50 (48)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	48.8 (48)
	National	39.8 (39)

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	66	68
	National		n/a

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13)

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	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	n/a	59	59

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates		59	59
	Average point score per candidate		287.3	287.3
National	Average point score per candidate		*(18)	*(17.5)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates		52	52		7	7
	Average point score per candidate		292.5	292.5		288.5	288.5
National	Average point score per candidate		*	*		*	*

*National comparison data for AS/A level results in 2002 are not yet available. Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	483	3	0
White – Irish	146	1	0
White – any other White background	80	2	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	38	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	0	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	6	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	28	1	0
Asian or Asian British - Indian	10	0	0
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani	22	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	0	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	2	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	38	2	0
Black or Black British – African	6	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	23	0	0
Chinese	0	0	0
Any other ethnic group	25	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	1	0	0

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

Teachers and classes

Financial information

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	60.6
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.9

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	370

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.3
---	------

Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	23
Key Stage 4	22.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Financial year	2001-2002
----------------	-----------

	£
Total income	3,112,281
Total expenditure	3,072,696
Expenditure per pupil	3,177
Balance brought forward from previous year	31,979
Balance carried forward to next year	7,606

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	14.6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	16.9
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	967
Number of questionnaires returned	782

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	48	44	6	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	55	42	2	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	54	41	3	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	41	46	9	3	1
The teaching is good.	50	45	2	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	41	42	12	3	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	57	35	4	1	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	79	19	1	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	43	40	11	2	3
The school is well led and managed.	59	35	2	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	61	35	2	0	2
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	35	41	12	3	9

Figures may not total 100 because of rounding. The questionnaire gives the views of parents with daughters in Years 7 to 13.

Summary of parents' and carers' responses

- Twenty-nine parents attended the pre-inspection meeting with the Registered Inspector. Their views were overwhelmingly positive and supportive of the school.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

32. The minimum entry requirements for admission to sixth form courses vary according to the intended programmes of study. The minimum entry requirements are on a sliding scale and from September 2003 will be six GCSE B grades for students wishing to study four AS level subjects to six GCSE grade C passes for students wishing to study two AS level subjects. The minimum entry requirement for students intending to take the Intermediate Vocational award is a range of GCSE grade D passes. In addition to the general advice and guidance on post-16 options provided in Year 11, all students intending to enter the sixth form are provided with two individual guidance interviews as well as subject specific interviews to ensure that they make the appropriate choice of courses. Students receive very good advice about which courses are most likely to suit their talents, with the result that they make very good progress during Years 12 and 13. About a half of the highest attaining students at GCSE continue into the sixth form at St Paul's with others choosing to continue their education in other sixth forms or colleges of further education. As a result, overall standards of attainment on entry to the sixth form, although above average, are not as high as the overall well above average results obtained in the GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11. Students who enter the sixth form with above average GCSE grades continue to sustain these high standards and obtain results that are well above average at the end of Year 13. A significant number of students from mainly Pakistani family backgrounds join the sixth form from other schools at the start of Year 12. Many of these students have high levels of attainment on entry to the sixth form and achieve as well as their peers. Students with special educational needs and those from different ethnic backgrounds also achieve equally well.
33. During the period from 1999 to 2001, the school experienced unusual but significant staffing difficulties due to extended periods of teacher absence through ill health. Despite the best efforts of the school to compensate for these absences, there was an adverse impact on attainment in the overall A-level results over the two years. Overall, the results in both 2000 and 2001 were average in comparison with all sixth forms but below the results obtained in 1999. In 2001, A-level results were well above average in biology and sociology and above average in English literature. Results were average in business studies, general studies, history and AVCE health and social care, below average in chemistry and geography and well below in mathematics. The numbers of students entered for art, computer studies, French and physics were too small for meaningful comparisons to be made.
34. The staffing situation stabilised in the 2001 - 2002 school year and action taken by the school through the school's self evaluation process, staff development and support for individual students had a marked effect on the 2002 A-level results. These show significant improvement over the results obtained in 2001. Although national comparative data for 2002 is not yet available, the 2002 results are well above the 2001 national average. The 2002 results show improvement in almost all subjects. All students obtained passes in the A to E range in art, biology, business studies, English

literature, French, general studies, history, physics and sociology and there was a significant rise in the number of students obtaining the higher A or B grades in chemistry, English literature, French, geography, general studies, mathematics, physics and sociology. Underpinning the continuing rise in standards is the excellent use the school makes of analyses of examination results to identify strengths and weaknesses, and to set challenging targets. These analyses show that achievement at the end of Year 13 in 2002 was above expectations.

35. AS results for Year 12 students in 2002 were very good. Almost all students passed the examinations with a good proportion attaining grades A or B. As a result, students were well equipped to continue their studies to A-level. Achievement across the many subjects examined in the AS examinations in 2002 was good overall. Students achieved particularly well in art, chemistry, English literature, geography, history, physics and sociology. However, there was a

degree of underachievement at the higher A or B grade level in mathematics. Although results in French were below average they represented satisfactory achievement based on students' standards of attainment on entry to the course.

36. In work seen during the inspection in the nine subjects inspected and reported in depth, students were achieving good and often very good standards in response to the high expectations of teachers. In no subject were students achieving below what might reasonably be expected at this stage of their courses, based on earlier evidence of their attainment in GCSE examinations. In mathematics, where results have fluctuated over recent years, standards and achievement in lessons were good. This is reflected in the much improved examination results in 2002. Standards in English Literature and sociology are consistently high, with one student in 2002 gaining English marks that placed her in the top five students entered for the syllabus nationally. In business studies, art and history achievement is good. Students demonstrate a willingness to explore new ideas. They analyse sources of evidence very well and evaluate these effectively. In French, students demonstrate well developed listening skills and respond appropriately and promptly to questions and instructions delivered in French at normal speed with little need for repetition. Current standards in biology are consistent with course expectations. The standards of work and students' knowledge and understanding of topics in health and social care are also consistent with course expectations. Most Year 13 students are achieving as expected in relation to their GCSE results.
37. Students communicate clearly, both orally and in writing. They use their mathematical skills competently in subjects such as physics, chemistry, business studies and geography. Students use computers with confidence to word-process their work and search for information on the Internet. The key skills course provides students with the opportunity to further develop their communication, application of number and ICT skills. These skills are sufficiently well developed to allow students to meet the challenges of their chosen subjects.
38. The number of students continuing from Year 11 into post-16 education, either at St Paul's or elsewhere, is high. Nearly all students remain for the full length of their courses. A very high proportion of students, over 90 per cent of the total in 2002,

continued on to university with many securing places at the most prominent universities in the country.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

39. Students have excellent attitudes to their work and to the school. They are very well motivated and are fully involved in their studies. In almost all of the lessons observed students demonstrated a high commitment to learning and a willingness to engage in independent study. They are sufficiently mature to understand the future benefits they will gain from their studies. Students are helped to take responsibility for their own learning, and do so with confidence. They clearly enjoy the responsibility given to them for arranging their own unsupervised study periods and use this time sensibly. The high level of student motivation is seen in all aspects of school life. For example, several have been to Romania to help underprivileged children and all engage in charitable fund raising activities. They demonstrate considerable initiative and have set up music and writing clubs, and decorated the sixth form common room.
40. Students' behaviour is excellent, both in their classrooms and in the sixth form base. They are keen to learn and pay close attention to their teachers and their peers. They respond well to questions and readily involve themselves in class discussions. They show confidence in discussing their work and in explaining interests and ambitions to inspectors. Students succeed because they have high personal ambitions, enjoy the subjects they are studying and pay careful attention to their teachers. They are aware of their position within the school and fully understand the importance of being good role models for pupils in the main school.
41. Students' personal development is excellent. It is underpinned by a shared value system and a firm commitment to the welfare and needs of others. They are very mature and proud of their role as ambassadors of their school and responsible citizens. Whilst being interviewed they were not afraid to voice their opinions and this they did clearly and sensitively. Sixth form students maintain a high profile in the main school where they help tutors and support individual and small groups of pupils. They enjoy this work, which forms an important part of the general ethos of the school. Several students are elected to the school council and make valuable contributions to school policy making.
42. The supportive and encouraging atmosphere within the sixth form results from the very good relationships between the students, and between students and their tutors. This makes a significant contribution to students' personal development. They become very independent learners who are well prepared for higher education and other directions when they leave the sixth form.
43. Attendance in the sixth form is above that in sixth forms in other schools. This good attendance has a marked effect on students' progress and achievement. The school monitors attendance closely. Although many students travel long distances to school they are normally punctual at the start of morning and afternoon sessions.

44. Overall, the attitudes, values and personal development of the students are a major strength of the school.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

45. Overall, teaching is very good. Teaching was identified as a strength in the last inspection report and has improved further since that time. All teaching is satisfactory or better and in 82 per cent of lessons it is good or better. Teaching is very good or excellent in 58 per cent of lessons. The very good teaching that students regularly receive meets their needs very well and students of all levels of subject competence and from all ethnic backgrounds learn successfully and achieve well. Of the nine sixth form courses reported in depth, teaching is very good in English, history, business studies, art and sociology, good in mathematics and biology. Teaching is satisfactory in French and health and social care. One excellent lesson was observed in art. Key skills are effectively taught and applied in all subjects.
46. The emphasis that the school is placing on the development of teaching and learning is seen in the quality of teaching in the sixth form. In all subjects, teaching enables students to learn and achieve well. Most lessons are varied, stimulating and with students' interest fully engaged. The strengths of teaching that were seen in lessons were also apparent in the work students had completed over previous months.
47. Teachers' high expectations of what students should achieve are apparent in almost all lessons. In history for example, students become absorbed in learning because of the high level of intellectual rigour and challenging pace in lessons. In English, students are motivated by the dynamic pace of lessons and the expectations that work will be of the highest standard. In mathematics, teachers are particularly skilful at ensuring that students understand complex mathematical concepts and are able to apply mathematical techniques with confidence when solving problems. In biology, teachers use their subject expertise well to provide clear detailed explanations in a careful logical sequence that allows students to understand intricate relationships.
48. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge enables them to plan their lessons in the most effective way for successful learning. Within the structure of most lessons, teachers plan opportunities for students to learn independently and for good individual support to be provided. English lessons, for example, are characterised by the very good planning of independent learning activities and individual support for students as they work their way towards greater knowledge and understanding. However, there is a need to increase opportunities for students to engage in independent learning in biology. Excellent subject knowledge and high intellectual demands are consistent features of teaching and learning in sociology.
49. Teachers make very good use of a wide range of resources to support students' learning and meet their individual needs. Good use is made of computers to support teaching and learning in many subjects. Technology is used well in business studies, for example, to help students research business and industry. The use of resources including interactive white boards, the overhead projector and other technological aids enhance students' learning in many subjects. However, the use of computers to support teaching and

learning in English is restricted by the inadequacies of the accommodation provided by the mobile classrooms.

50. Classroom management is very much based in the excellent quality of relationships both among students and between students and teachers. Because relationships are so positive, the learning atmosphere is highly supportive and students are willing to express ideas and challenge each other's thinking. They know that they can express their views without conflict. Very good relationships underpinned effective group work in a Year 12 health and social care lesson. In this lesson, students worked together to evaluate assignments against the examination grade criteria and gained a better understanding of the strengths and weaknesses in their own work as a result. Good relationships helped students in a Year 13 biology lesson gain a greater understanding of the digestive system because they were willing to exchange ideas. Mutual respect and very good relationships assist the discussion of issues in sociology and English literature. The confident participation of students with their teachers enables them to clarify their ideas in a very active and effective learning partnership.
51. Teachers expect students to work at a high standard both at home and at school. Homework is set regularly and well planned to consolidate and extend classroom learning. Students are conscientious in completing their homework and generally complete it successfully. Assignments are set appropriately and assessment is used very effectively to ensure that students are clear about the standard of their work and what they must do in order to attain high grades. The aim of teaching at St Paul's is not only to increase students' knowledge and understanding of the subjects they are studying, but also to develop the skills and attitudes that will make them successful lifelong learners. Inspection evidence suggests that the school is making good progress towards the achievement of this aim.

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

52. The school provides a broad curriculum for its students from which they benefit both academically and socially. It is well planned to meet the needs of all its students, while focusing on a predominantly academic curriculum. In planning the sixth form curriculum, governors and senior management have been mindful of the post-16 options available to students both through the Catholic partnership and in other institutions in the area and the need for cost-effectiveness in sixth form provision. Fifteen subjects are offered at AS and A-level, including psychology in Year 12. In addition a single or double award AVCE course is offered in health and social care and an intermediate GNVQ Part 1 in business and ICT. This range of courses provides students with an appropriate number of choices and students are satisfied that the curriculum meets their needs and aspirations. Those students who seek a more vocationally orientated curriculum are given help and guidance to find suitable courses in other schools or colleges. The good relationships the school enjoys with other post-16 providers ensures that students are able to choose from a comprehensive range of courses at the end of Year 11.

53. Students benefit significantly from the Catholic ethos that gives the school its distinctive character and permeates all of its provision. They are encouraged to undertake service activities such as paired reading, listening to Year 7 students read and supporting their literacy skills and social development. Students are able to exercise responsibility by serving on various committees or by taking on the role of prefects. The school and its students have a proud reputation for raising funds for charities and for supporting charitable work in developing countries.
54. One of the strengths of the curriculum is the provision for students to enrich their learning through a programme of general education. This includes a core theology programme, PSHE, key skills and an AS general studies course for all students, the examination for which is taken in January of Year 13. Many students successfully follow this general studies course through to A-level, which is taken at the end of Year 13. Students are encouraged to undertake leadership roles within the school, for example organizing events such as talent shows, quizzes and sporting events for pupils in the main school. This provision makes a significant contribution to the development of students as articulate confident young people, rich in ideas and a commitment to supporting others.
55. Students also have access to a suitable programme of extra- curricular activities that include a variety of musical groups, drama productions and sporting activities. Students frequently undertake theatre visits and there are workshops, conferences and field trips aimed at widening students' experience. Students are encouraged to participate in local and national competitions, such as debating competitions and the UK mathematics challenge. Many students continue with the Duke of Edinburgh award. Despite the considerable range of activities the school offers, both parents and students believe the school could increase the range of activities, most notably in team sports. One of the problems the school faces in the provision of extra-curricular activities is that many students travel long distances to the school and this has to be taken into account in planning after school activities. In these circumstances inspectors judge that the school provides an appropriate range of extra-curricular activities. However, inspectors recognise that the range of provision of extra-curricular sporting activities has varied due to extended teacher absence through illness.
56. Good provision is made for the development of key skills and standards of literacy and numeracy are well above average. Students are well prepared to meet the higher intellectual challenges of their chosen subjects. Curriculum provision for ICT was identified as a weakness at the time of the last inspection and this is reflected in students' competence in ICT, which is below their levels of competence in literacy and numeracy. This issue has now been tackled in the main school and particular attention is being paid to the development of sixth form students' ICT skills through the key skills programme.
57. Careers education is very good and forms part of a broad PSHE programme. The very strong links with local universities enable the school to ensure that students are made fully aware of the choices available to them in higher education. Many students are able to experience master classes offered by the universities. The careers library has a wealth

of information including computer programmes to assist students in their career choices.

58. Overall the provision for students' personal development including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. Provision for the spiritual development of the students is excellent. This aspect of students' development, underpinned by the Catholic faith, is the foundation of the school community and permeates all aspects of school life. School assemblies and form tutor periods are significant events for reflecting upon challenging questions such as human courage and hope. Notices around the school also provide students with food for thought and reflection as they go about their daily routine. Students treat the issues raised seriously, display respect and empathy with others and use the quiet periods for personal thought well. In lessons, students are regularly encouraged to question and challenge their own beliefs and values and to explore those of others. The school admits students from other faiths and opportunities are taken to explore and reflect upon the similarities and differences whilst fully respecting these values and beliefs. Frequently opportunities are taken to seek students' own views and to encourage them to express them and to consider the views of others; students therefore feel valued and all are confident in discussion and debate.
59. Provision for students' moral development is excellent. The school has a clear code of conduct and the moral principles and values that underpin the life and work of the school help students gain a clear idea of right and wrong. Respect for others of whatever faith, age or condition is nurtured and is evident in every aspect of school life. In lessons opportunities are taken to explore moral issues fully, for example in biology students explore the issues raised by genetic research, in German and French the moral issues associated with abortion and racism are explored, in history moral issues involved in warfare are discussed and in English students discuss the role of women and their treatment through their study of the Canterbury Tales. Students take responsibility for their own behaviour and for protecting the rights of others.
60. Provision for social development is very good. Students play an important role in organising events such as the school production and raising funds for charity as well as helping pupils lower down the school. They prepare and provide assemblies and musical events themselves. Those involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme also do community service. In the majority of lessons students work collaboratively in pairs and small groups and often present the results of their research to others, although there is still scope for this aspect to be developed further.
61. Provision for students' cultural development and opportunities for students to appreciate their own and others' cultures are very good. The Christian heritage of this country is fully recognised, as is the Muslim faith, through discussion and assemblies. These experiences encourage insight and shared enjoyment. In art, English and modern foreign languages students investigate different cultures and students are given opportunities to appreciate dance and literature from different cultures but there is still scope for further development of this aspect in the day-to-day life of the school.

62. The school has made very good progress in curriculum provision since the last inspection. The strengths have been maintained and the weaknesses identified in the report have been tackled effectively.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

63. The school's procedures for assessing sixth form students' attainment and progress are very effective. The school is rigorous in its use of ALIS, a national data gathering and analysis system, which provides reliable predictions about students' performance in the A-level examination. This information is used to set target grades and to measure the 'added value' effect of teaching and learning. Assessment is used effectively within subjects to monitor students' progress and, every term, students' performance is measured against their target minimum grades. This information, together with other measures, such as attendance levels, informs teachers, students and parents about how well they are doing. This system is very effective in identifying which students need additional support and in which subjects. Student self-assessment of the progress they are making is an integral part of the school's very good assessment procedures. One of the many strengths of the sixth form is teachers' detailed knowledge of examining board assessment criteria. They use this knowledge effectively in the marking of students' work and in giving feedback to students. As a consequence, students are well prepared for public examinations. Through regular reports and meetings, parents are kept well informed of how well students are progressing and what they need to do to improve further. Parents are very appreciative of the information they receive and this strengthens the link between home and school and underpins students' achievement.

Advice, support and guidance

64. The school provides high levels of care, support and guidance for its students. Subject teachers and the sixth form tutors have excellent relationships with students and ensure that personal help is readily available as and when it is needed. Students are expected to take responsibility for their own learning, and this includes knowing when they need to seek help from their tutors. Their tutors and the head of sixth form carefully monitor their personal and academic progress. Students have very open access to their tutors, and are kept very well informed of their progress.
65. The prospectus gives clear information about the sixth form. A very good and well planned induction programme ensures that students do choose appropriate courses. Students are closely monitored during the first few weeks of their studies to check how well they have settled in. This is particularly true for students new to the school, who were most complimentary about the support and help they received in these early weeks. This leads to high retention rates on courses and underpins the positive views shared by the students about the sixth form. The information and guidance students receive about future careers and opportunities in higher education are excellent.

66. The school has excellent procedures for the protection and welfare of students. Arrangements for ensuring students' health and safety are constantly updated and all portable electrical and other equipment is checked regularly. Emergency escape procedures are exercised at least every term. Escape routes are well marked and accessible. The school maintains an up- to- date written policy and risk assessment procedures are closely monitored. Students' attendance and punctuality are carefully monitored, and the success of this work is reflected in the good attendance levels. Procedures for recording and monitoring their attendance are thorough and work well. Students are punctual at the start of lessons. The support and guidance provided to students is a strength of the sixth form.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?

67. Parents hold highly positive views about the school and the education it provides for their daughters. They receive good information from the school and they consider that their children are well supported by their tutors. The sixth form students enjoy their role in the school.
68. Students feel they are taught well and are challenged to do their best. They enjoy such challenges and consider it helps them to mature and gain confidence. They also appreciate the accessibility of teachers if they have difficulties with their work. The majority feel they are helped to study independently and that they received clear and helpful information about the courses available to them. They also enjoy being in the sixth form.
69. Some concerns were expressed through the questionnaires. A number of students felt that there are not enough extra-curricular activities, that they do not receive enough advice about what will be available when they leave school and that they would not be able to rely on sensitive support and help from the school if they had problems.
70. The students' positive views are supported by the inspection findings and inspectors welcomed their openness, courtesy and confidence in expressing their views. The inspection team could find little evidence to support the students' less positive opinions, and the evidence from interviews with students strongly contradicted the negative views. The careers advice and guidance are excellent and the students have very good access to their tutors for personal support. The school provides a good range of enrichment activities both during the school day and after school, although the range of provision of after school activities is restricted by the long journey times many students have between school and home.
71. The overwhelming response of both students and parents is positive. Both students and parents are pleased with their school and proud of it.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

72. The quality of leadership of the sixth form, as part of that of the whole school, by the headteacher, senior leadership team and governors is excellent. The effectiveness of leadership is shown by the rising student numbers and standards attained in examinations by the sixth form. Students' achievement is generally above expectations because leadership ensures that the quality of teaching is very good and the process of learning across the sixth form is equally very good. The combined leadership of headteacher, senior staff and governors gives very clear educational vision to the development of the sixth form. This is illustrated very well by the emphasis given in improvement planning to ensuring that all have equal access to the educational opportunities the school provides. The very firm commitment and systematic practice of making provision highly inclusive for every student, irrespective of background or ethnicity, as of right are priorities of leadership and underpin the preparation of students for life in a culturally diverse society. Overall, sixth formers have a great deal of confidence in what the school provides for them.
73. The sixth form has its own well-informed management team. This team, comprising the head of the sixth form and sixth form tutors, provide highly effective day-to-day management that is readily accessible to sixth form students. The head of the sixth form ensures good links with the senior leadership team through the deputy head and is able to contribute to all decisions affecting the sixth form.
74. Subject leadership of the nine subjects reported in depth in the inspection is never less than satisfactory and in many departments leadership is mostly good or very good. Most subject leaders provide clear educational direction to the work of their sixth form subjects. They are increasingly taking on responsibility for monitoring and evaluating the work of their departments. The process of performance management is well integrated into the school's management systems and is being used well to support continued improvement.
75. The strategic management of the sixth form is very good. The priorities in the sixth form improvement plan are identified through the school's rigorous monitoring and evaluation procedures. Any areas of under performance are quickly identified and prompt action taken to improve the situation. This has a direct bearing on standards and the progress students make in the sixth form. Overall, planning for change and improvement and evaluation of outcomes are effective in ensuring the continued progress of the sixth form. Since the last inspection the sixth form has grown in size and this expansion has been managed well. Excellent use is made of assessment information to evaluate the quality of education the school provides and to set targets both for individual students and for the sixth form as a whole. The effectiveness of these procedures is seen in the significantly improved A-level results in 2002.
76. Funding is used in a very cost-effective way. The income provided for the sixth form enables the school to provide students with an appropriate curriculum with suitable subject choice. The quality of teaching is also very good. The school does not currently need to spend the full amount allotted per sixth form student and funding can be deployed to benefit other parts of the school. However, the sixth form has been a particular beneficiary in the past of some significant improvements to accommodation, through provision of its social and private study facilities.

Resources

77. The overall standard of resources in the sixth form is satisfactory. Spending on resources is about the same as the national average and in all subjects resource provision is generally suitable for the needs of the sixth form. The expertise and experience of teachers in the sixth form are well suited to the demands of sixth form teaching and they are deployed effectively to provide a rich and varied curriculum. Provision for the professional development of staff is excellent in the sixth form. Staff development is given a high priority in the school and this is contributing to the continued improvement seen, for example, in the quality of teaching and learning. Teachers are encouraged to experiment in their teaching and to evaluate their success. The outcome is many examples of teaching that are highly innovative and very effective. Induction procedures for newly qualified teachers and newly appointed teachers are very good.
78. Both governors and senior management are careful to seek best value when deciding about spending in the sixth form and are concerned to evaluate the impact of these decisions on the quality of education the school provides. Overall, the school achieves very good value from the very cost-effective provision it makes for sixth form students. Achievement is above expectations overall; provision is very good, as shown, for example, by the quality of teaching; parents and most students who have expressed a view are highly satisfied with the quality of education provided in the sixth form.
79. Overall, the accommodation for the sixth form is satisfactory although there are some significant weaknesses. The sixth form common room and quiet areas are pleasant and well furnished, and students treat them with respect. Many sixth form subjects are taught in good-sized classrooms, which provide suitable accommodation. The learning environment in all teaching rooms is enhanced by excellent displays of students' work. However, although the English department is well placed to build on its success and make further improvement it is hampered by the poor accommodation provided by the mobile classrooms. The dampness in these rooms prevents the installation of computers on a broadband system and so interferes with students' access to ICT during lessons. Some of the teaching rooms used for history, sociology and business studies are too small for the size of the teaching groups and this restricts teaching and learning strategies. Many of the teaching rooms for mathematics are spread across the school. The school is aware of these weaknesses and governors and senior management are striving to obtain the funding needed to rectify them.

PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, nine subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	13	8	-	62	-	20.0	-
Biology	25	8	-	72	-	23.6	-
Chemistry	20	25	-	90	-	32.0	-
Physics	6	33	-	100	-	36.6	-
Business studies	11	9	-	91	-	30.0	-
Computer studies	12	8	-	42	-	12.5	-
Health and social care	13	9	-	100	-	29.0	-
Art and design	8	75	-	100	-	52.5	-
Geography	23	26	-	91	-	33.4	-
History	23	46	-	96	-	40.0	-
Sociology	30	65	-	97	-	49.0	-
English literature	33	69	-	100	-	50.3	-

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-B		% gaining grades A-E		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	10	50	-	90	-	78.0	-
Biology	10	20	-	100	-	68.0	-
Chemistry	11	46	-	91	-	70.9	-
Physics	4	50	-	100	-	85.0	-
Business studies	7	0	-	100	-	51.4	-
Computer studies	10	0	-	91	-	38.0	-
Art and design	6	50	-	100	-	93.3	-
Geography	13	54	-	93	-	86.1	-
General studies	26	38	-	100	-	80.0	-
History	22	37	-	100	-	86.3	-
Sociology	15	73	-	100	-	94.6	-
English literature	33	42	-	100	-	84.8	-

French	4	25	-	100	-	90.0	-
--------	---	----	---	-----	---	------	---

Intermediate vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	14	100	-	86	-	-	-
Health and social care	38	52	-	11	-	-	-
Leisure and tourism	19	94	-	53	-	-	-

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

80. Advanced mathematics and biology courses were inspected and reported on in depth, but physics and chemistry were also sampled. Although the number of students was very small, physics A-level results in 2001 were above average and students did well in comparison with their results at GCSE. Teaching in the one physics lesson observed was very good. The teacher's subject knowledge was used skilfully to develop a high level of discussion even in a very small group. As a result students made very good progress was in the understanding of amplitude and frequency modulated signals in relation to a topic on avionics. Chemistry A-level results in 2001 were below average and were also below those expected when compared with GCSE results. Teaching in the one chemistry lesson observed was satisfactory. In the lesson students made satisfactory gains in their understanding of the effects of high frequency light on chemical bonding.

Mathematics

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching is consistently good.
- Experienced teachers who have very good subject knowledge.
- Good use of assessment information for planning and target setting.
- Very good team work ensures that the department is well led and managed.
- The use of computer technology in the preparation and presentation of lessons.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities for students to undertake independent study.

81. In 2001, the standards achieved by students at A-level were well below the national average, with only two students achieving the higher A or B grades. Almost all students achieved a grade in the A to E range. In previous years, results in mathematics have fluctuated, although slightly below average overall. Results improved sharply in 2002 with the school recording one of its best ever results in A-level mathematics. All students achieved their target grades with over a half gaining A or B grades.

82. The 2001 student performance at AS level was well above the national average. A third of the Year 12 students who took the AS level examination achieved A or B grades and most achieved grades in the A to E range. In 2002, student performance matched the national average for 2001, although only one student achieved a higher grade. Two students took AS further mathematics with notable success. Just on half of the students who took AS level in Year 12 have returned to complete the A-level course. A good number of students take the opportunity to re-sit GCSE mathematics in Year 12, to improve their grades, and they do so with success.

83. Students currently studying A-level mathematics are achieving very well in lessons. Year 13 students studying the normal distribution are able to apply their prior knowledge of statistics to calculate probabilities associated with the proportion of area under the normal curve. They are able to apply these principles to effectively solve problems drawn from everyday experiences. Students in Year 12 have made a good beginning to their AS level studies. This is because, in their planning, teachers are taking into account students' prior attainment, and plan activities that reinforce students' knowledge and understanding. In turn, students are enjoying their studies and are gaining the confidence to tackle more advanced work. The teaching of mathematical methods is very evident in students' work and is underpinned by the high quality of students' note taking and supporting examples.
84. Teaching in the sixth form is overall good. Teachers use their very good subject knowledge and experience most effectively in the teaching of the methods and principles needed to approach standard problems in each of the modules studied. Teachers build effectively on students' prior knowledge and questioning is used effectively to ensure that they understand topics before moving on. This was seen in a very good Year 12 lesson, for example, where on the use of vectors to form equations and solve related problems. Teachers make every effort to involve students in discussion or in the presentation of solutions to the class. There is a need to extend this approach to improve students' confidence and their ability to explain their mathematics. This would lead students to a greater understanding of why methods chosen work as seen, for example, in a Year 12 lesson on aspects of calculus.
85. Teachers make very effective use of a range of new technology to present ideas. Students are also encouraged to use ICT to enhance their learning and deepen their knowledge of particular topics. In all lessons, students receive effective individual support, praise and encouragement. This enables them to consolidate their learning and move on with greater confidence. Not enough use is made of open-ended tasks to encourage students to think more widely about what they are studying and to develop their independent research skills.
86. Although students' work is marked regularly, marking does not always provide clear guidance on what they need to do in order to improve. Discussion in class does much to give students pointers about how well they are doing and what needs to be improved. The department collects very good assessment information on each student and effective use is made of this to provide students with target grades and to monitor their progress towards them.
87. Students' attitudes are very good. They are highly attentive, work well together and give mutual help when necessary. The atmosphere in lessons reflects the very positive relationships that have been forged between students and their teachers. Teachers have high expectations of what students will achieve and provide considerable support to students outside their lessons. This encourages students to learn.
88. The overall leadership and management of mathematics in the sixth form are good. Teachers share their expertise with one another and seek to improve their own knowledge and understanding of the subject. Departmental guidance is extensive and schemes of work set out clearly what is to be taught. Teachers are very knowledgeable

about the requirements of the examination courses and use this effectively to plan lessons. They work well as a team. Resources for the teaching of sixth form lessons are good and are used well. The department effectiveness is reduced because teaching rooms are scattered about the school. Overall the department has made good progress since the last inspection.

Biology

Overall, the quality of provision for biology is **good**.

<p>Strengths</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teaching is good. • Students respond well to challenge. • Students work very well together and with their teachers.
<p>Areas for improvement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The number of students achieving grades A and B. • More focused target-setting based on science GCSE results.

89. The A-level examination results in 2001 were well above those of all other schools nationally. A-level results were better than those achieved in 2000. Nearly all students who took the examination gained a pass grade. The proportion gaining higher A or B grades was above average when compared with other schools. In relation to their GCSE results, students performed as expected. The provisional AS level and A-level results in 2002 were below the 2001 national average and not as good as those obtained in 2001 particularly at the higher grades.
90. Current standards are average. Most Year 13 students are achieving as expected in relation to their GCSE results. In the best lessons, students make very good progress as a result of very good teaching. In a very good biology lesson, for example, students made very good gains in their knowledge and understanding of the digestive system. Higher-attaining students, in particular, recalled previous knowledge very well and used it effectively to increase their understanding of the topic. Written work is generally well presented and matches the confidence which students display in the classroom.
91. Students in Year 12 are a little over one third of the way into their course. Nevertheless higher-attaining students are achieving well. They show, for example, good knowledge and understanding of the processes involved in mitosis. Most are successfully moving on from GCSE work into new areas of biology. Written work is well developed and, when provided with the opportunity to do so, students make good progress in developing their skills of independent research.
92. Overall, teaching is good. The principal features of teaching are the use of very good subject knowledge by teachers, good well- focused planning and, in most lessons, a range of methods, which maintain interest and engender learning. In some lessons, however, there is not enough opportunity for students to work independently. Homework is set which extends class-work and often takes the form of examination questions or work that involves further research. Assessment is used very well to monitor the progress of students, to identify underachievers and adjust teaching

accordingly. Day-to-day marking is thorough and usually provides valuable information for students on how to improve their performance.

93. Students' attitudes to learning are good. Most respond very well to challenge, work hard and most show interest in their work. They support and help each other and enter into mature discussion as part of their learning. Most undertake independent work maturely, can extract information and make their own notes on, for example, the factors that affect the dissociation of oxy-haemoglobin. Lower-attaining students are far less confident. They are less willing to participate in discussions, have greater difficulty in independent research and rely more on their teachers for information.
94. Leadership and management in the biology department are good overall. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. Target setting, based upon grades predicted from the average point score that students achieve at GCSE, is used effectively to provide learning goals. This system of predicting grades, however, leads to targets that are often lower than those obtained when targets are based solely upon science GCSE results. The range of learning support materials available in the form of advanced level microscopes, standard textbooks and biological periodicals is good. As a result, students have good opportunities for independent research and study. The department has a small number of computers but not enough for the larger groups. This limits access, resulting in reduced opportunities for the use of ICT in laboratory work.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

95. The school does not provide any advanced courses in this curriculum area.

BUSINESS

96. The focus of the inspection was on business studies. The Intermediate GNVQ Part 1 course in business and information technology was also sampled. The course was introduced in September 2001 and students taking the course are provided with opportunities to take RSA and CLAIT examinations in text processing to gain accreditation in key skills at level 2. To enhance the vocational relevance of the course students have two blocks of work experience. In addition, visits to local businesses are also built into the course. In addition to their work experience and business visits, the GNVQ students gain valuable experience through being responsible for operating the school bank in collaboration with a local high street branch. Teaching in the one lesson observed was good. The teacher skilfully drew students into an extended discussion on equal opportunities legislation and prepared the ground for effective use of the Internet for students to carry out independent research into the legislation and its effects.

Business studies

Overall, the quality of provision for business studies is **good**.

Strengths

- Lessons are well prepared, have good pace and challenging activities.
- Students respond very well in lessons and make very good progress.
- Good use is made of industry visits and links with the wider community.

Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT for presenting and analysing data.
- A permanent teaching base.

97. Business studies was not offered as an A-level subject at the time of the last inspection. Results in the 2001 A-level examination, although slightly below average in the A to E grade range, were above average in the higher A or B range and above average overall. In 2002, although all candidates achieved a grade in the A to E range, there were no A or B grades. Irregular attendance by a small number of candidates was cited as a contributory factor to the fall in grades. The 2002 AS level results showed an improvement over the previous year in both the percentage of students achieving A or B grades and the percentage achieving grades in the A to E range. However, the percentage of A or B grades was below the 2001 national average.
98. Following a change in the leadership of the department from the beginning of the current school year a number of changes have been made that are having a positive impact upon standards. The standards reached by current students on both AS and A-level courses are above expectations for this stage of the course. Scrutiny of students' folders indicates the rise in standards. The work of most students is at least in line with course expectations and most often above. Students demonstrate this well in lessons. They are keen to contribute and are good at arguing their case in class discussion. Many are prepared to put alternative points of view and are able to back them up with appropriate facts and figures. This was seen in a lively Year 13 lesson on critical path analysis, for example. Higher attaining students in Year 12 are very quick to respond in lessons and demonstrate a very good grasp of key business concepts. Students in Year 12 also show that they are becoming mature and independent thinkers. They are able to draw effectively from recent industrial visits to exemplify topics being covered in lessons. Written work is often of a high standard in both years. There was, however, little evidence in folders of the use of ICT to record, graph and analyse business information.
99. The overall quality of teaching in this single teacher department is very good. Courses are planned in detail; lesson objectives are clear and shared with students. Lessons have good pace, which is well maintained. Good question and answer sessions are included to develop and reinforce learning. All lessons seen had a very positive working atmosphere, which encouraged participation. Relationships in lessons are very good. All lessons include an effective plenary session, which consolidates gains in knowledge and understanding. Assessment is thorough. Students' work is marked regularly and contains detailed comments that help students to make progress and provides appropriate targets for improvement. Students' files are very well presented and provide a clear record of work covered.
100. The business studies department is very well managed. Students' attitudes are very positive and retention rates are very good. Examination results are analysed in detail

and the information is used effectively to guide planning and to set targets. There is no permanent teaching base for the department and some of the accommodation used for advanced level courses is cramped with no access to computers.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

101. Disappointing results in the AS and A-level computer studies courses over recent years led to a change of examining board and syllabus with the introduction of AS level ICT in September 2002 and A-level ICT in September 2003. The new course is proving to be more relevant and motivating to students and standards are improving.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

102. The school does not provide any advanced courses in this curriculum area.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

103. The focus of the inspection was on the AVCE course in health and social care.

Health and social care

Overall, the quality of provision in health and social care is **satisfactory**.

Strengths:

- Teachers' enthusiasm and commitment inspires students.
- Students' attitudes and response in lessons.
- The use of assessment.

Areas for improvement

- The level of challenge in learning activities.
- Teaching and learning strategies to promote independent learning.

104. In Years 12 and 13, the department currently provides a double award (12 unit) Vocational A-level (AVCE), and either the Vocational A level (6 unit) or Vocational AS level (3 unit) Award. Numbers of students following this vocational route, although historically small, are growing.
105. The AVCE results in 2001 were broadly in line with the national average. The 2002 results for both the Vocational A and AS levels in health and social care were similar to those achieved in 2001. Results, although variable over recent years, have generally been in line with the national average.
106. The standards of work seen during the inspection are consistent with expectations both in Year 12 and Year 13. Students display a satisfactory knowledge and understanding of the topics currently being studied. Year 12 students are beginning to express themselves clearly when evaluating their findings and Year 13 students demonstrate

higher level speaking and listening skills. Students talk enthusiastically and in a confident and knowledgeable manner about the evidence in their files. A comparison of students' coursework with their GCSE grades shows that the achievement of all is in line with expectations and that some are achieving above expectations. Year 13 students understand the fundamental concepts of health and social care. Many can manage their learning independently and can identify their weaknesses. Comparison of Year 13 students' coursework with their portfolios from Year 12 shows that satisfactory progress is being made.

107. Teaching is satisfactory, overall, with some examples of very good teaching. Most teachers have secure subject knowledge and show a genuine passion for health and social care. In the best lessons the theory and practice of health and social care are well related, giving students realistic insight into the demands of the sector, enabling good learning to take place. Teachers' enthusiasm and commitment generally inspire students who respond well when appropriate challenges are set for them. However, there is too much reliance on printed handouts in some lessons and students are not always sufficiently challenged to take responsibility for their own learning. Over a period of time, lesson plans and students' work, show that a varied range of methods is used and students are able to develop different ways of working. These need to be extended so that students are provided with more opportunities to engage in independent learning. Some teachers make particularly good use of questioning as the lesson goes along to ensure that students fully understand what they have been taught so far.
108. Assessment is continuous and appropriate. Tutors ensure that assignments are set in such a way that students have the opportunity to provide the required evidence. Assignments link directly to the assessment requirements set out by the examining body for each unit. All students have copies of these requirements. Assessment of portfolio assignments follows the guidelines set by the examining body. An assessment and standardisation plan, containing all assignment dates, is drawn up at the beginning of the academic year. A tutorial system is used in order to provide ongoing assessment and feedback while the assignment is being carried out. This effectively reduces the assessment workload once the work is finally submitted.
109. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. The head of department and most staff share a common purpose and put students and their achievements first. Targets are becoming demanding, yet realistic, and there is careful monitoring of both achievement and retention. Financial and other resources are effectively deployed to support educational priorities. Best-value principles are understood and applied well. There were no specific references to health and social care in the previous report and so it is not possible to assess progress since the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

110. The focus of the inspection was on art.

Art and design

Overall, the quality of provision for art and design is **very good**.

Strengths

- The policy of open access to the course.
- Examination results and students' achievement are very good.
- Teaching is very well planned and imaginative, with very effective use is made of ICT.

Areas for improvement

- Work in ceramics.

111. The school offers AS and A-level courses to all students and there are no barriers to entry. As a result, the numbers of students taking art and design are increasing steadily. All students do a 'mini-foundation' course in their first term, as many have not taken GCSE art.
112. Standards well above average and have improved significantly since the last inspection. The numbers entered for the A-level examination are too small to make meaningful comparisons with national figures. Two students were entered in 2001 and both obtained grades in the higher range. In 2002, all students obtained grades in the A to E range with just under half gaining A or B grades. The AS examination results were also very good in 2001 with all students gaining pass grades with just under 80 per cent gaining A or B grades. Again in 2002, all students obtained pass grades with about one third gaining A or B grades. These results represent very good achievement when standards on entry to Year 12 are taken into account.
113. Inspection evidence confirms these very good standards. Drawing skills are well developed and used confidently on very large-scale works. Colour is used very effectively, particularly in silk painting and textiles. Students discuss their work with enormous enthusiasm and justifiable pride. Photography and digital manipulation of images are used as inspiration for charcoal drawings and oil paintings exploring movement. Students' workbooks show detailed exploration of a very wide range of ideas. Some students draw effectively on their cultural and religious heritage to produce impressive pastel and pen and ink drawings of architectural features of religious buildings, and prints inspired by Mehndi and Henna painting. Students also use wire or mudroc to produce sculptures making dramatic commentaries on contemporary society. However, opportunities for ceramic work are limited by a lack of technical support and the need to relocate the kiln.
114. The quality of teaching is generally very good and occasionally excellent, and has improved significantly since the last inspection. A high level of expertise is evident throughout, and teachers' willingness and competence in demonstrating techniques enables students to learn quickly. Students take considerable responsibility for their own learning and use ICT extensively to research the work of classical and contemporary artists to guide their own studies. The history of art is woven into the teaching, as in a lesson on chiaroscuro when students were in a darkened room, illuminated by candles. As they used charcoal then ochre to sketch portraits of their friends, highlighting shade, then light, they learned about the ways in which light and shade were used by Raoul and Rembrandt. They made very good progress finishing the lesson by producing a third still life sketch of a group of figures.

115. Lesson planning is very good. Teachers take account of students' prior attainment and then provide activities that both challenge and encourage them. Assignments are carefully marked and students appreciate the detailed written feedback they are given. Mature discussions about preparatory studies for examinations lead students to be practical and realistic, such as when they are advised to further develop skills which they have used earlier rather than embarking upon new activities. Students are very closely involved in the assessment and monitoring of their progress as they proceed through the course. This helps to sustain interest throughout the very demanding pace of their course. Communication skills are well taught and those who have English as an additional language learn very well.
116. The attitudes of the students towards this subject are excellent. They value the very good relationships that the staff establish with them. They recognise the importance of, and appreciate, the many planned visits to local galleries and artistic venues, which the teachers organise. Students are highly motivated by the enthusiasm for the subject shown by their teachers and the fact that their teachers want them to do well. They also value the support and confidence shown in them when they take responsibility for their own visits, as in the case of four students who are organising a day trip to Paris to visit the Pompidou Centre and the Picasso exhibition.
117. The quality of leadership and management is very good. The courses themselves are well managed and shared between two teachers who work together very effectively. Targets for improvement are set and assessed regularly. The teachers are very inventive and use the facilities in the city creatively. Workshops involving local artists have a positive impact as does the involvement of trainee teachers from the university. The improved accommodation since the last inspection had been instrumental in raising standards and the completion of the final stages, involving the relocation of the kiln, will enable the ceramics module to be taught. The accommodation and resources for the sixth form are good, although there are not enough sinks in the art rooms for larger teaching groups. The use of a dedicated room in which students can work during individual study periods, discuss and share ideas and display their work has been most beneficial.

HUMANITIES

118. The focus of the inspection was on history and sociology, although geography was also sampled. In 2001, although almost all students obtained A-level grades in geography in the A to E range, the proportion of higher A or B grades obtained was below average, as were the results overall. However, the 2002 results show significant improvement. Almost all students obtained grades in the A to E range with over a half obtaining the higher grades. These results represent very good achievement when standards on entry in Year 12 are taken into account. AS level results in 2001 and 2001 were very similar. Again almost all students obtained grades in the A to E range with about a quarter obtaining higher grades. Teaching in the two lessons observed was very good. In both of the lessons students made very good progress in the acquisition of geographic knowledge and skills because teaching was well planned to include a range of learning activities that engaged and motivated students.

History

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **very good**.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning.
- Students' attitudes and relationships in lessons.
- Subject leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- Cramped accommodation restricts the variety of learning activities.
- The consistency and clarity of marking procedures.

119. With the exception of two candidates in 2001, all students have obtained grades in the A to E range in the A-level examinations over recent years. As a result, the overall pass rates have been above average and reflected good achievement. In the last two years, the proportion of students obtaining the higher A or B grades has been close to the national average although in 2000 the proportion was well above. Results at AS level in 2001 were also above average, with almost all students gaining pass grades and about a half gaining higher grades. The 2002 results are similar to those obtained in 2001.
120. The standards of work of current students are above expectations and they achieve well. In both sixth form years, students' very well organized files contain large quantities of well-presented work including essays, source questions and copious notes, although there is sometimes scope for greater reference to chronology. Progress in the communication area is very good as students express themselves clearly and accurately orally and in writing. Although there are occasional minor errors in spelling, the overall standard of written English of students of all ability levels is well above average, and reflects the attention paid to literacy. Students have well developed skills in the analysis and interpretation of a variety of material; reading for understanding, highlighting and annotating supporting notes and specialist articles confidently. They listen to, evaluate, debate and sometimes resolve conflicting interpretations of historical issues well, as discussion is a regular feature of history lessons. Students' independence in learning is strongly developed through the quantity of research needed to contribute effectively in lessons and most obviously in the selection, investigation, reading, note making, drafting and final writing of their personal studies.
121. Teaching is very good. Teachers have high expectations, very good subject knowledge, undertake detailed planning, and, insofar as the cramped accommodation permits, use a wide range of teaching and learning strategies. Computers are regularly used in lessons to research and word process material, so students' ICT and source handling skills are well developed. In a very good Year 13 lesson seen, students were challenged to cut and paste significant extracts from a lengthy speech by Philip Snowden to build up a table of arguments for and against socialism. Students are very well supported in their learning; answers to examination questions are regularly practised, mark schemes are shared with them, and staff are always available to offer advice and guidance. Although teachers mark work regularly and closely, they sometimes use level and/ or numerical marking which does not give the students as clear an indication of likely attainment at A-level as would a letter grade.

122. A crucial element in how well students learn is their very positive attitudes to the subject. Their answers to interview questions, as well as the quantities of work they complete, clearly demonstrate their cheerful acceptance of a heavy workload; in all lessons observed, they

responded instantly and actively to teachers' requests, instructions and exhortations. The quality of classroom relationships, which are founded upon courtesy, mutual respect, humour and a concern for others, also make an essential contribution to students' very good learning.

123. The subject is very well managed and led. Programmes of study and schemes of work have been extensively revised and rewritten to incorporate the most recent curriculum changes. Performance in external examination is analysed in minute detail and the lessons learned, as for example, about the importance of investigation, and early parental contact in the case of unexplained absence, applied to current students. Sixth form teachers work closely together and this has helped the subject to sustain good improvement since the last inspection.

Sociology

Overall, the quality of provision for sociology is **very good**.

Strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning.
- The proportion of high grades in the 2002 advanced examinations.
- Students' attitudes to the subject.
- Subject leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- Cramped accommodation which constricts the range of teaching and learning strategies.
- Planned opportunities for developing ICT skills in lessons.
- The accessibility of the standard text book for lower attaining students.

124. Results in A-level examinations, both in terms of overall pass rate and average points score, have fluctuated over recent years, although they have nearly always been above average. National comparative information is not yet available for 2002. Nevertheless, the 2002 results show a rise on the results obtained in 2001, when they were well above average. In addition, the proportion of candidates obtaining the higher A or B grades in 2002 was very high in relation to the 2001 national average. Results in the AS examinations have been similarly strong in the last two years.

125. Lessons and work seen during the inspection indicate that the attainment of current students is also above average. Students complete a good variety and volume of written work reflecting a wide knowledge and understanding of a range of sociological terms and studies. Students develop considerable independence in learning because they have to undertake much reading and note-making outside lesson time and discuss their findings in class. The subject makes a good contribution to the development of key

skills. Standards of literacy are good overall although lower attaining students sometimes make quite elementary errors in spelling such as confusing ‘affect’ and ‘effect’; the standard textbook is not very ‘user-friendly’ for lower attaining students. In paired, group and class discussion, girls’ communication of their ideas is articulate, confident and in many cases, extended. Numeracy skills form an integral part of the subject, as students are required to analyse and interpret sociological data from statistical sources, as in a Year 12 lesson when students had to draw inferences from tables showing different patterns of educational achievement of boys and girls over time. Skills in ICT are less well developed as whole class opportunities for using computers are not yet incorporated into schemes of work, although students do use them, as for example in researching the concept of an underclass.

126. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and students make good progress; consequently, the majority achieves results above their predicted grades. Strengths include very good subject knowledge, detailed supporting material giving valuable guidance and clear exposition. Much thought has been given to devising activities which enhance students’ ability to analyse and interpret text, although cramped accommodation limits the range of teaching and learning strategies practicable with large groups. In a very good Year 13 revision lesson on examination skills girls highlighted and annotated an exemplar essay closely, before working well in pairs to construct their own top ten tips for writing a sociology essay. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace with teachers setting challenging tasks for students to complete to strict deadlines, in order to maximise progress. Students’ positive attitudes to their teachers, the subject and each other, make a significant contribution to the very good classroom relationships and hence to the quality of their learning. They feel that they are treated as young adults, and that studying the subject has widened their perspectives on the world around them, and helped them develop and express their own opinions.
127. The subject is well managed and led. Despite heavy responsibilities elsewhere in the school, the head of department has a clear appreciation of the potential for further progress and has identified strategies to realise it. Detailed examination analysis is undertaken and the results are well used to monitor student progress. Teachers work closely together so that students benefit from consistency in approach and expectations. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

128. The focus of the inspection was on English and French. German was also sampled. In the lesson seen, standards were above expectations and achievement good. Teaching and learning were good and encouraged the student to present her own ideas in German and as a result gain in independence and confidence in using the language herself.

English

Overall, the quality of provision in English is **very good**.

Strengths

- Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and enthusiasm for literature.
- Effective procedures for assessing students' work underpin well above average standards of attainment and achievement.
- Students' high commitment to the subject.
- The contribution the subject makes to students' personal development.
- The support given to students, mainly of minority ethnic backgrounds, who enter the school in Year 12.
- Subject leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- Accommodation.

129. Results obtained in AS and A-level examinations in English Literature are well above average. The department has maintained the very good standards reported at the last inspection and standards have been above or well above average for the last five years. During this time no student has failed the examination and the proportion achieving the higher grades A and B has been above average. In 2002, the average points score in the A-level examination was 6.5, an increase on the 2001 score of 6.2, which was above the national average. One student gained marks that put her in the top five students entered for the syllabus. Students who sat AS examinations in 2002 achieved particularly well; all gained at least Grade D and 26 of the 33 candidates gained Grade A or B. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds, who were new to the school in 2001, achieved very good standards and value the support they are given to integrate into their groups.
130. Inspection evidence confirms these standards. Students' attainment is well above average, both in written work and in their discussions of literature. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and enthusiasm for literature engage students who rapidly become as enthusiastic and discriminating readers as their teachers. They talk with confidence about their personal response to texts and in Year 12 build on the very high standards achieved in GCSE examinations, developing very perceptive analytical and critical skills. In their extended writing they employ an extensive and sophisticated critical vocabulary, a detailed knowledge of their texts and a mature understanding of the writer's intentions. They write confidently about the social and historical context and how responses to literature are affected by personal experience. Year 13 course work displays an impressive insight into a wide range of challenging texts.
131. The teaching of A-level English is very good with some excellent features. Teachers constantly require their students to develop their own personal response through well-structured group work. The carefully planned and prepared lessons offer intellectual challenge which brings out the best in students who recognise that texts can be interpreted in different ways. Two very good Year 13 lessons were observed. In one, students were able to present a variety of readings of Herbert Read's poem 'My Company', referring in detail to the poet's linguistic and structural devices to support their opinions. In the other, students at an early stage in their study of 'Othello' argued coherently the evidence for different interpretations of the character. In two Year 12 lessons discussion of 'The Handmaid's Tale' led to animated discussion of the way in which Atwood intrigues and engages her readers while transmitting a warning about society. An outstanding feature of all the lessons observed is the way in which the examination and course work requirements are shared with students to equip them with

the skills to achieve high standards. Assessment objectives, mark schemes, model answers and very constructive marking ensure that students have a clear understanding of how they can best demonstrate their knowledge and understanding and gain high marks.

132. Students enjoy their English and work hard to achieve high standards. They collaborate effectively, listen carefully to what others contribute and test their ideas, referring closely to the text and weighing their opinions against published criticism. They value the support and guidance of their teachers both within and outside the classroom and the way they are expected to be independent learners. They speak warmly of the way the course develops them as people, and those who have joined the regular trips to the Western Front describe movingly the effect of studying war poetry while surrounded by the evidence of the carnage of battle.
133. The department is very well led and managed and the subject leader gives firm guidance and provides a model by her own teaching and commitment. She has overcome recent staffing problems by giving up her own time to ensure that high standards are not compromised. Teachers plan and develop programmes of study as a team and use similar approaches to texts. A very good development programme supports this commitment to continuous improvement. The department is well placed to effect further improvement but development is hampered by the poor accommodation as the damp in the temporary classrooms prevents the installation of computers on a broadband system.

French

Overall, the quality of provision for French is **satisfactory**.

Strengths:

- Students' listening and reading skills.
- Students' attitudes towards their learning and the quality of their relationships with teachers.
- Teachers' command of the language and the role models they provide.
- Management of the subject is good.

Areas for improvement

- Students' speaking and writing skills.
- Opportunities for students to use the language themselves to gather and give information.

134. A-level results in French were reported to be average at the time of the last inspection. Because there were no Year 13 students taking French at the time of this inspection, it is not possible to compare standards with those reported in 1997. The standards of Year 12 students presently following the AS level course in French are below average. However, this represents satisfactory achievement when students' prior attainment is taken into account. Students' listening skills are well developed and they respond appropriately and promptly to questions and instructions delivered in French at normal speed with little need for repetition. However, responses in French are often brief or

limited to single words or short phrases. They identify the main points and specific detail from a variety of texts including poetry and the press. However, although they are increasing their knowledge and understanding of grammar and their range of vocabulary, students lack confidence in using the language themselves and find difficulty expressing their ideas in speech and writing.

135. Students have very positive attitudes towards their learning and are concerned to do well. They have very good relationships with their teachers and appreciate the help and guidance they are given.
136. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. Teachers have a very good command of the language and provide excellent role models for their students. They use French very effectively and extensively to conduct activities in lessons and this is effective in developing students' listening skills. Activities and resources are appropriate and well sequenced enabling students to build on previous learning. However, sometimes too much information is presented for students to absorb at once without sufficient time to practise and consolidate individual elements and this slows students' progress. Students are given the opportunity to do research and to present their findings to others. However, in the lessons seen during the inspection, activities were mainly led by teachers and this decreased students' opportunities to use the language themselves. Not enough opportunities are provided for students to use the language on a regular basis and to engage in discussion to practise using the structures being introduced.
137. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The course is well organised and meets the requirements of the examination. Teachers work well as a team to share and develop teaching and learning strategies but there is scope to further develop these strategies by sharing good practice across both languages. Assessment information is used very well to set targets and identify areas for development. Marking is good and gives students effective guidance about how to improve but grades given to individual pieces of work do not always give a clear idea of attainment in relation to examination criteria.