

INSPECTION REPORT

WATFORD GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Watford

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117575

Headteacher: Mrs Helen Hyde

Lead inspector: Mrs Helen Hutchings

Dates of inspection: 3rd – 7th November 2003

Inspection number: 259284

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:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll:	1238
School address:	Lady's Close Watford Hertfordshire
Postcode:	WD18 0AE
Telephone number:	01923 223403
Fax number:	01923 350721
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr P McCloskey
Date of previous inspection:	16 th – 20 th February 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Watford Grammar School for Girls is a large, voluntary aided comprehensive school in the centre of Watford. The school has a strong academic focus and, although comprehensive by designation, has partial selection by academic ability or musical aptitude. It is heavily oversubscribed. The attainment of the girls on entry to the school in Year 7 is well above that found nationally. Very few girls enter or leave the school at times other than the normal times of entry and a very large proportion stay into the sixth form. Girls come from families whose socio-economic circumstances range from well-above average to below average, but are above average overall. The proportion of girls eligible for free school meals is well below the national average. The school has a very broad ethnic intake, covering most principal world faiths. The proportion speaking English as an additional language is high, although currently there are no pupils at an early stage of learning English. The number of girls identified as having special educational needs, including those with statutory statements, is well below the national average. Needs are mainly related to specific learning difficulties, visual or physical impairment. The school has Beacon status, achieved Specialist Visual Arts College status in 2002 and has received a number of awards, including a third Charter Mark in 2002, Investor in People re-award and School's Achievement Awards in 2002 and 2003.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
7541	Helen Hutchings	Lead inspector	
9053	Vivienne Phillips	Lay inspector	
22423	Jon Lovgreen	Team inspector	English English as an additional language
5525	Richard Cooper	Team inspector	Mathematics
29742	Patricia Fyans	Team inspector	Science Physics (sixth form)
8076	Terry Bendall	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
33135	Kim Ropek	Team inspector	Art and design
32590	Roger Fenwick	Team inspector	Design and technology
33002	John Woodhouse	Team inspector	Geography
18663	Phil Burchell	Team inspector	History Government and politics (sixth form)
20830	Graham Smith	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
30814	Elizabeth Coley	Team inspector	Music
3726	Maureen Bean	Team inspector	Physical education
20719	Ann Fraser	Team inspector	Religious education
2653	Robin Lomas	Team inspector	Classics (sixth form) Special educational needs
32777	Jim McVeigh	Team inspector	Citizenship Chemistry (sixth form)
32231	Adrian Lyons	Team inspector	Business education (sixth form)

The inspection contractor was:

e-Qualitas Limited

Langshaw
Pastens Road
Limpsfield Chart
Oxted
Surrey
RH8 0RE

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the inspection contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted Inspections*', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	10
Standards achieved in subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	14
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	20
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES	22
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4	
SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	54

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school provides an excellent quality of education for its girls and gives very good value for money. Girls have excellent attitudes to the school and to their learning and they achieve very well and attain very high standards because of the very good teaching. The headteacher provides excellent leadership and the governing body gives very strong support for the work and future of the school.

The school's main strengths are:

- The results in tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations are very high and place the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally.
- Girls throughout the school achieve very well because of their excellent attitudes and well-developed learning skills.
- Teaching is very good; teachers have good specialist knowledge and use this very well to plan interesting activities for girls.
- The school provides excellent opportunities for learning and enrichment outside lessons.
- The quality of leadership throughout the school is very effective in organising the curriculum and keeping teaching relevant for the girls.
- There are no significant weaknesses.

The school has made very good progress since the last inspection. It has brought about further increases in attainment, particularly in the sixth form and has addressed the issues raised in the last report effectively. Procedures for assessing, recording and reporting girls' progress are very good. Management responsibilities are clear and planning is very effectively supporting the school at all levels. The curriculum meets statutory requirements although some aspects of design and technology and information and communication technology are not covered in sufficient depth. The governors and the school have not yet found an arrangement so that all girls have access to an act of collective worship every day.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools ¹
		2001	2002	2003	2003
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A* ²	A*	A*	A
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	A	A	n/a ³	

*Key: A - well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average
For Year 11, similar schools are those whose pupils attained similarly at the end of Year 9.*

In the test results taken at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations, girls attain standards which place it in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Attainment in GCSE is also well above that of similar schools and the improvement trend in GCSE is above the national trend. **This represents excellent achievement for girls throughout their time in the main school** and is consistent across the curriculum. Girls use their basic skills of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology well in their other subjects and this helps them to attain very high standards.

¹ Similar schools refers to schools where pupils attained similar levels at the end of Year 9.

² A* indicates performance in the top five per cent of school under comparison.

³ Comparative data for sixth form is not yet available for 2003.

Girls' personal development and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are excellent. Their attitudes and behaviour are excellent, as are their attendance and punctuality, which all underpin very high achievement.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is excellent.

Teaching is very good and consistent across the school. Teachers set girls interesting, challenging tasks in lessons and follow this up with relevant homework. This encourages high levels of motivation; learning is very good and becomes a partnership between teachers and girls.

Support for the girls' academic and personal development is very good. The curriculum meets the needs of the girls well and provides them with a very good academic basis for further study. Links with parents are very good and based on providing them with information to encourage their girls' achievement. The school is using its status as a Visual Arts College and a Beacon School well to enrich other subjects.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The headteacher provides excellent leadership and has been a strong influence in establishing a culture of enjoyment in learning and high standards. Governors and the leadership group have a shared view about the future direction of the school and work very well together to provide clear direction for others and gain their commitment. Management is very good and is focused very well on ensuring that the conditions are in place for continued high levels of achievement. Governance is very effective.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The strong relationships between home and school support girls' achievements very well. Parents are very pleased with the school and what it offers. The response to the questionnaire shows that parents have a strong belief that the school is well led and managed. Girls and their parents recognise that girls are expected to work hard and to do their best and feel that this is a good school, where they are taught well and of which many are justifiably proud.

Discussions with girls suggest that most are very pleased with the education they receive but recognise that some girls feel under considerable pressure to do well and that a few teachers do not always fully recognise the efforts they make to achieve highly. As a result, a few girls feel that they are not treated fairly nor listened to with respect. Most feel they can approach a trusted teacher or tutor with a problem. Girls are enthusiastic about all that the school offers and appreciate that the headteacher listens and leads by example with a 'can do' attitude.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The school is aware of areas which it wishes to develop further but there are no significant areas of weakness for the school to address.

To meet statutory requirements:

- The school should provide a daily act of collective worship.

THE SIXTH FORM

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is excellent and it provides very good value for money. This is because the students achieve high standards as a result of their impressive commitment to learning and the excellent teaching they receive.

The main strengths are:

- Standards are well above average with results among the highest in the country in many subjects.
- Excellent learning results from highly effective teaching and expert knowledge of subjects.
- Students work impressively hard, making and sustaining very good gains in their learning.
- Leadership and management are excellent and clearly focused on enabling students to achieve their full potential.
- An impressive range of enrichment activities allows students to develop their personal skills to the full.
- There are no significant weaknesses.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form are shown below. They are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected. Lessons were sampled in biology, drama, economics, film studies, German, home economics, music, sociology and sports studies. Teaching was very good in all subjects and standards were well above average. No subjects were inspected within the areas of information and communication technology and hospitality, sports, leisure and travel.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, Languages and communication	<p>Very good in English. Standards are high. Very good teaching combines expert subject knowledge with stimulating ideas for lessons. Students further their intellectual curiosity alongside their love and appreciation of literature.</p> <p>Very good in French. Results are above average and rising. Staff have strong subject knowledge and teaching is consistently very good.</p>
Mathematics	<p>Very good. The high standards achieved are brought about by very good teaching and very positive attitudes. Lessons are planned to stimulate mathematical thinking.</p>
Science	<p>Very good in chemistry. A comprehensive, well-organised scheme of work promotes consistency in teaching. Standards are well above average and students have an excellent attitude to their work.</p> <p>Excellent in physics. Students enjoy the intellectual challenge of the subject and find the topics covered stimulating. Highly effective teaching of difficult ideas enables students to reach well above average standards.</p>
Humanities	<p>Very good in classics. Standards of achievement remain well above average because of very good teaching and the excellent attitude of students.</p> <p>Very good in geography. Results are very high. Students' achievements are very good as a result of very good teaching.</p> <p>Very good in government and politics. Results have improved markedly since 2000 and are now well above average. Students' discussion and debating skills are exceptional.</p>

Humanities continued	<p>Very good in history. Results are very high as a result of some excellent teaching and learning which allows students to build on previous high attainment. The willingness of students to support and work with each other is exceptional.</p> <p>Very good in religious education. Results are well above the national average. Very good teaching and students' positive attitudes and hard work help them to achieve very well.</p>
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Satisfactory in product design. Results are very high. Teachers have very good subject knowledge but some lessons lacked pace and interest. There is a lack of computer-aided manufacturing equipment.
Visual and performing arts and media	Very good in art. Standards are well above the national average. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and expertise.
Business	Very good in business studies. Standards are very good and students achieve well, due to very good teaching and learning from a team of expert staff who set the subject in its real world context.
Health and social care	No courses are taught in this area.
General education	The ethics content of the general studies programme in Years 12 and 13 meets statutory requirements for religious education although the time allowance is a little low. The school offers a very good range of physical education activities in Year 12 and all students take part. A community sports leader award is available. A key skills programme is also offered in Year 12.

The curriculum areas are broadly common across all post-16 education and training. They do not necessarily correspond with subjects and courses taught by the school. Inspectors make judgements 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'.

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The quality of advice, guidance and support for sixth formers is very good. Assessment in subjects is very strong and helps to identify and support the learning needs of individuals. Students are well tracked by the sixth form tutors and one-to-one interviews identify any concerns so that appropriate action can be taken. Support for university applications is excellent and the careers guidance provided through the Into the Future module in general studies is very good.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent, with similar qualities to those found in the main school. The sixth form team is clearly focused on ensuring that students achieve at their highest level, in an ethos that encourages and supports the development of the individual. Subject leadership is very good.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Sixth formers are very positive about the quality of education they receive. They feel that teachers and tutors know their strengths and weaknesses very well and that support is available when they need it. Students appreciate the many opportunities to express their views both formally and informally and their views have influenced an increased range of courses on offer. They enjoy being part of the school community and take an active role in the induction of new staff and students. Students were most appreciative of the challenging and stimulating teaching they receive and feel that they are very well prepared to take responsibility for their own learning. They feel that this will be invaluable in the next stage of their education.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

By the end of Year 11, girls attain standards which are very high when compared to national standards and **well above** those of similar schools⁴. Results in the sixth form are also well above national averages and represent **excellent** achievement.

Main strengths

- Standards are very high in the main school and well above the national average in the sixth form.
- Achievement is very good in the main school and excellent in the sixth form.
- Achievement is consistently high across subjects and year groups.
- There are no significant weaknesses.

Commentary

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2003

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	42.5 (43.0)	33.3 (33.3)
mathematics	45.5 (44.1)	35.3 (34.7)
science	42.0 (41.0)	33.7 (33.3)

There were 182 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

1. The attainment of girls on entry to the school is well above national averages in the tests taken in Year 6 in their primary schools. Within the group there are many girls with attainment which is average and a few girls enter with below average attainment. The test results at the end of Year 9 in 2003 place the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally for performance in all the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Girls achieved very well in these subjects. When comparisons are made with schools with similar levels of attainment on entry, their attainment is very high. From its high starting point in 1998, the school's improvement trend is broadly in line with the national trend. In other subjects, standards observed during the inspection are generally well above national expectations. This represents very good achievement overall.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	97.3 (98)	52.6 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	99.4 (98)	86.3 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	94.6 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	55.2 (54.1)	34.7 (34.0)

There were 182 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

⁴ Similar schools refers to schools where pupils attained similar levels at the end of Year 9.

2. During Years 10 and 11, girls build very well on their achievements in Year 9 and the standards they attain in the GCSE courses are well above average in most subjects. In English, mathematics and science, standards are very high. The school's trend in the average GCSE point score per pupil is above the national trend. The school is placed in the highest similar school group that includes many fully selective schools and the value-added score is well above that of other schools in this group. This represents very high levels of achievement from the time they entered the school. Their achievement is consistent across the range of subjects they follow. Analysis of performance data shows that, apart from a very few individuals, all girls make similar progress. Different ethnic groups, girls with identified special educational needs, those with English as an additional language and girls identified as gifted and talented all achieve exceptionally well and above the standards expected from their prior attainment levels. These very high levels of attainment are mainly due to the excellent attitudes that girls have developed during their time in the school and the focus of leadership in constantly striving to improve attainment and the quality of teaching. The standards of girls currently in the school are also similarly very high.

3. Standards in the basic skills of literacy, numeracy are well above expectations. Girls' competence in information and communication technology (ICT) is good. They use these skills very well to support their work in other subjects.

Sixth form

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	99.6 (99.8)	n/a ⁵ (95.9)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	76.4 (78.3)	n/a (42.2)
Average point score per pupil	353.0 (359.5)	n/a (263.3)

There were 157 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

4. The examination results in 2002 were well above the national average in both General Certificate of Education advanced level and advanced supplementary level (GCE A-level and AS level), again reflecting the excellent attitudes of the students and their high level learning skills. Results in 2003 are at similarly high levels although there are no national yardsticks yet to make a comparison.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The attitudes, behaviour and personal development of girls in the main school and in the sixth form are **excellent**, as are their attendance and punctuality, which all underpin their very high achievement. The school is extremely successful in fostering girls' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

Main strengths

- Attendance and punctuality are excellent and a first rate foundation for success at school.
- Girls' commitment to work and achievement flourishes impressively throughout the school.
- Behaviour is exemplary and helps girls to make the most of their opportunities to learn.
- Girls develop into admirable, mature, confident young women, poised to take full advantage of the opportunities of adult life and learning.
- Roots of excellent study habits and personal qualities in the sixth form develop in the main school.

⁵ 2002 is the latest year for which full comparative data is available. References are made in the commentary to any significant changes in performance levels in 2003.

Commentary

5. Throughout the school, girls are exceptionally well motivated and keen to make the most of the opportunities they are given to learn and achieve all of which they are capable. They thrive on high quality lessons that increase their knowledge and understanding subject by subject. They appreciate the chance to be with others who are equally committed to hard work and personal achievement. As a result, the school has a culture of “*I can do it and I will*” where “*mediocrity is not an option*”, which is very well understood and accepted by pupils. They know that they need to be in school on time, ready to learn, so they comply with the school’s very high expectations of attendance and punctuality willingly. Girls are ambitious and deeply committed to doing their best, not only in academic work, but also in the daily life of the school and through the extended curriculum. For example, they spend time designing colourful and moving assemblies, such as that to celebrate Diwali, which they presented impeccably.

6. The best lessons are characterised by stimulating exchanges of ideas where teachers and pupils listen with deep interest and respect to a full range of opinions and well-argued points of view. Girls value lively debate and appreciate the opportunity to express themselves in an atmosphere where very high quality relationships ensure a high degree of openness and trust. In such contexts, they rise to the challenge presented, as in a drama lesson where they used the freedom and visual impact of masks to explore physical expression. When staff are less encouraging or find fault more readily, it affects girls’ perceptions of how interested the school is in their ideas, but does not discourage them from learning from the best teaching. Their persistence, concentration and commitment sometimes compensate for shortcomings in less effective lessons.

7. Girls respond impressively to the school’s very demanding standards of conduct and work. Bullying and racism are not tolerated, but when isolated instances of taunting occur, they are usually stopped swiftly. Exclusions are extremely rare. Girls show commendable involvement in the life of the school through specific responsibilities such as form leaders, charity monitors and year, school and sports council representatives, as well as in high rates of participation in activities outside lessons. As a result of the huge range of opportunities to use initiative, develop personal interests and serve the school and wider community, girls show striking maturity and personal responsibility. They have huge respect for each other’s qualities and beliefs and highly developed sense of right and wrong. Their spiritual and cultural awareness are first rate because of the way they learn to value diversity and the contributions of different heritages to modern society. The school uses images particularly well to reinforce this, such as those in photographs of trips to China and South Africa, and in dramatic anti-racism posters.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	95.2	School data	0.2
National data	91.0	National data	1.2

The table gives the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	<i>Exclusions in the last school year</i>	
		Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	638	0	0
White – Irish	10	0	0
White – any other White background	36	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	8	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	31	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	16	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	150	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	43	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	35	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	3	0	0
Black or Black British – African	1	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	0	0
Chinese	33	0	0
Any other ethnic group	6	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	222	0	0

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

Sixth form

8. The pattern of excellent attendance, conduct and work habits evident in the main school continues in the sixth form and ensures that students there make the most of chances to gain a first class education with very high achievement. Students sharpen excellent independent study skills. They become highly responsible, mature young adults who are particularly well placed to cope with work or further study.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school provides an **excellent** quality of education. Teaching and the curriculum are highly effective in promoting very good learning so that achievement overall and out-of-lesson learning is excellent. The school's support and guidance for the girls and its relationships with parents and the wider community are very good.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching and learning is very good in the main school and excellent in the sixth form. Procedures to assess girls' work are also very good and give them good guidance on how work can be improved.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good and better than found nationally.
- Teaching in the sixth form is excellent.
- Teachers have very good, and in many cases excellent, specialist subject knowledge which they use very well to plan interesting and relevant lessons for the girls.
- Teachers know the girls and the quality of their work very well and make appropriate arrangements when any are experiencing difficulties.
- Marking is informative and girls know precisely what they have to do to improve their work further.
- Girls respond well to the high expectations of them to complete homework.
- The targets set for girls with special educational needs do not provide teachers with specific support in planning for individual needs.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 189 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
19 (10%)	81 (43%)	60 (32 %)	27 (14 %)	2 (1%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons; figures in brackets show percentages where 30 or more lessons are seen.

9. The quality of teaching is very good and the proportion of very good and excellent teaching has improved further since the last inspection. Now over a half of lessons seen were very good or excellent, compared to a third when the school was last inspected. The proportion of excellent teaching is well above the national average.

10. Teachers have very good specialist knowledge and understanding of their subjects and in many areas, for example in English, mathematics and science, it is excellent. Across the school, teachers use this knowledge confidently to plan series of lessons which provide structured and progressively demanding learning for the girls. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and consequently plan for a wide variety of stimulating activities. This is appreciated by girls, who also report that the wide range of teaching styles used meets their own preferred learning styles well. Learning is seen as a partnership between girls and teachers, with both parties clear about their own responsibilities to the process. At its best teaching is inspirational.

Example of outstanding practice

A Year 13 economics lesson illustrated exceptional teaching and very deep learning.

The lesson focused on the impact of tourism on the world economy and, stimulated by a PowerPoint slide, began with a rapid discussion in which all students participated, analysing the image. Students very easily used aspects of economic theory, such as income elasticity of demand, to analyse the sensitivity of tourism to economic shocks, and then to consider the impact on changes in tourism numbers on local communities. The lesson was conducted at a phenomenal pace with a very strong emphasis on using a variety of learning styles applying the techniques popularised by Edward de Bono's 'thinking hats' approach so that all learners could make excellent progress. Excellent relationships and the sheer passion for the subject of both students and teacher led to excellent achievement in developing economics knowledge and understanding, together with

11. Teaching takes place at a good pace and learning is very good because of the high expectations and level of challenge in the work; no-one has time to get bored. Teaching generally takes account of the differing needs of individuals and extension or support work is made available to ensure that all pupils are achieving very well. Teachers know the girls and the quality of their work very well and pick up quickly when an individual is having difficulty and make appropriate arrangements, such as after-school support, to ensure that misunderstandings in learning are dealt with at an early stage. Opportunities are also taken to provide good levels of one-to-one support with high quality dialogue between girls and teachers within lessons, when time makes this possible.

12. Teachers make effective use of a range of strategies, including the Key Stage 3 Strategy, to structure their lessons to very good effect. For example, starter activities are planned to have particular relevance to the main part of the lesson and time is given at the end to review what has been learned. Relative weaknesses in teaching relate to the timing given to activities, when one activity is given too long, or when teaching becomes overly directed by the teacher, limiting opportunities for girls to investigate ideas for themselves or when time is wasted copying out tasks or information which could be gained more effectively from information sheets.

13. The very good relationships teachers have with girls and which girls have with each other are used very effectively by teachers to plan for a high level of interactive work, such as paired and group discussion, which gives girls very good opportunities to articulate their own thinking. The girls' excellent attitudes and exceptional levels of motivation are used to full effect to underpin learning. They are also encouraged very effectively to develop a wide range of independent learning skills, for example by researching topics for themselves and then making presentations to the rest of the class. In many subjects, the emphasis on the appropriate use of subject language is powerful and teachers own use of general language extends girls' language skills and understanding very well.

14. Teachers use open and supplementary questions very well to drive learning forward, to assess what has been learned and adjust their lesson planning accordingly. Assessment is very good. As well as nationally required assessments at the end of Year 9, intermediate assessments are used regularly to inform girls and their parents of attainment levels. The strength of the school's assessment procedures lies in the quality of teachers' knowledge and ongoing dialogue with girls about their work and the detailed marking which takes place regularly. Marking is informative and girls know precisely what they have to do to improve their work further.

15. Staff have high expectations that girls will undertake homework tasks regularly. Generally, homework is relevant and successfully extends and consolidates learning taking place in lessons. Girls respond very well to these high expectations and take pride in the quality of their work and presentation.

16. The assessment of special educational needs when girls first come to the school is good, so that a range of information is available. Individual education plans are not in place for girls whose statements of special educational needs relate to physical rather than learning needs, in line with guidance in the Code of Practice, although the provision for these girls is excellent. The targets set in individual educational plans are related to general teaching strategies and do not provide teachers with specific support in planning for individual needs. However, teachers' very good knowledge of the needs of the girls enables them to plan effectively and teaching takes good account of individuals' needs and supports pupils' progress.

Sixth form

17. Most teachers teach both in the main school and in the sixth form. They use their knowledge of girls' work earlier in the school very well to make sure that learning in the sixth form is stimulating and relevant to students. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent overall. Teachers have a particular expertise in challenging students to produce work of the highest quality. This gives them the confidence to approach examinations confidently and successfully achieve the highest possible

results. Assessment provides outstanding guidance to the students on how to improve their work. Students work very hard and are self-confident, independent learners.

The curriculum

The school provides a **very good**, broad, academic curriculum that suits the needs of the girls well. It is enhanced by a wide-ranging enrichment programme and supported well by appropriate opportunities for out-of-hours learning. Resources meet curriculum needs well. Accommodation is **satisfactory** overall and the school has been implementing its well-planned programme of improvement.

Main strengths

- The curriculum is well structured and meets the needs of pupils very well.
- Extra-curricular provision and out-of-hours learning are excellent.
- Resources and materials for lessons are chosen and used well.
- The library provides a very good introduction to an academic resource.

Commentary

18. The breadth of curricular opportunities is very good and is structured well to provide a balanced academic education. The school is implementing the National Key Stage 3 Strategy and this has a positive impact on standards. In addition to their academic curriculum, girls have good opportunities for their personal development in tutor time and through the personal and social education (PSE) programme in every year group. Information and communication technology (ICT) is only taught discretely in Year 7 and other subjects do not always have enough access to computers to give girls an in-depth experience of using ICT. Girls can choose from a very wide range of options at the end of Year 9. No vocational courses are included, but there are a number of other subjects which are not offered at every school, such as more than one foreign language, Latin and classical civilisation. As a consequence of achieving Visual Arts College status in 2002, the school has widened the range of GCSE courses available to include ceramics and photography. The designation has had a very positive impact on how subjects are taught and stimulating displays throughout the school are updated regularly to provide a rich and attractive learning environment. As part of its strategy to promote academic excellence, the school has offered master classes for Year 6 pupils in local primary schools and has provided booster classes for girls within the school, which helps to raise their performance in the national tests.

19. The curriculum is very well led and managed by a deputy headteacher and the school is responsive to new ideas and initiatives. For example, following an initiative with a local independent school, a programme of key skills has been introduced into the sixth form. The curriculum is regularly monitored and evaluated. As a result of the most recent evaluation, two issues are being addressed; the total teaching time, which is below the nationally recommended level; and the presence of short single periods on the timetable. These issues have not adversely affected standards, but have made it difficult to meet the preferences of individual departments.

20. The formal taught curriculum is enhanced by excellent enrichment opportunities across a range of sporting, arts and other activities. Visits for each year group include a wide range of venues, including museums, theatres, places of worship, galleries, factories and geography field study sites. There are regular cultural visits abroad. Previous destinations include China, Egypt, Israel and Turkey and there are regular pupil exchanges to France and Germany. Specialist speakers, such as MPs, magistrates and newspaper editors, often visit the school, which enhances the curriculum further. Numerous clubs in all subjects further enrich the experience girls have at school, including sixth form students who run some of the clubs. Activities are very well attended and appreciated by the girls. Weekly 'sport for fun' sessions offer the chance for general participation in physical activity, whilst the many clubs allow more focus on individual sports. Music plays an important part in the school's life and girls have many opportunities to perform in public through concerts and other musical productions. There are a large number of musical groups, including orchestras, bands and choirs.

21. Work experience is very well planned for and used effectively to broaden girls' learning. It is led and managed with enthusiasm and clarity. The criteria for the allocation of available placements are clear and transparent. Whilst staff are very supportive across the school, not enough use is made of the experience by subjects other than PSE. As part of the school's Beacon School activities, a higher education website has been developed to provide good guidance for students in the sixth form.

22. Resources are good, well chosen and used. The library is well stocked with appropriate books for all levels. It provides a very good introduction to an academic library and care is taken to make it welcoming so that it is used well. Accommodation, overall, is satisfactory and the school has been implementing a well-planned programme of improvement. There are some deficiencies across the school although staff and girls work hard and ensure that standards are not affected. Some classrooms are small for the numbers in the groups. Office accommodation for middle managers is limited and storage space is restricted. Some chairs and desks are old and need replacing. By contrast, accommodation for the sixth form is very good and appreciated and used well by students. Accommodation in the art, science and physical education departments has significantly improved due to recent refurbishments.

Sixth form

23. The majority of girls continue into the sixth form where they have an open choice from a very wide range of A-level courses. English offers film studies and drama as well as literature, whilst in mathematics there are the specialisms of mechanics, statistics and decision mathematics available. An extra dimension in humanities is government and politics and two modern languages are offered. Provision for business education through economics and business studies courses and an AS course in accounting, offered as an extension activity at lunchtimes, is very good. Collaborative arrangements with the local boys' school have extended the range of courses still further and give more flexibility to produce appropriate group sizes. The school has made very good provision for physical education (PE) in Year 12. A wide choice of activities is offered to the students including opportunities to learn new disciplines and a course to gain a community sports leader award. Overall this represents very good provision and it meets the needs of sixth formers very well. Almost all students successfully gain places at university.

24. The Study Buddy system is very popular, both with the sixth form students who provide individual mentoring support and with the younger girls who receive it. Allowing sixth form students to take responsibility for supporting others adds significantly to their personal development. The younger girls benefit both in the gains they make in learning and through the personal attention they receive.

Care, guidance and support

The school takes **very good** care of girls through very careful steps to ensure their welfare, health and safety. Girls receive very good guidance for their academic and personal development, based on monitoring their achievements. Processes for seeking pupils' views are well established and very effective.

Main strengths

- The school has a very strong commitment to high quality care to enable girls to make the most of their opportunities for success.
- Induction procedures for new pupils are very good.
- Pupils are given very good access to well-informed support, advice and guidance, particularly in the sixth form.
- The school has a tradition of involving girls in its life and development, with the headteacher taking the lead in seeking and acting on their views in the main school and in the sixth form.

Commentary

25. The school has very clear procedures in place to ensure that girls are safe from harm and ready to learn, which include thorough arrangements for child protection. Staff and governors take great care to safeguard girls while they are on and off site and give very clear guidance on matters such as health, safety and first aid. Internet access policies are in place and followed scrupulously. Staff are very well aware of the special medical and health needs of their pupils. As a result of this high quality attention to girls' welfare, they feel secure and can concentrate on their studies.

26. The very good relationships between staff and girls ensure that most girls have someone to whom they can talk, and they value the approachability of the headteacher very greatly. Their needs are very well known to staff, particularly as a result of the very strong lead the headteacher has taken in efforts to build trusting relationships with each student. New students to the school are very happy with the induction arrangements provided for them and their parents, and these arrangements are evaluated regularly. As a result, girls settle quickly into school life and its routines, being monitored very closely at this stage so that those who need extra support are identified quickly. The heads of year, tutors and other key staff offer very good support to those students who need it. Careers guidance, delivered through PSE, begins in Year 8 and continues throughout the school, giving very good support and advice at appropriate moments in the students' school career, with particularly good preparation for post-16 choices started in Year 11. Parents are fully involved in academic and personal support and guidance including the option choices process, and parents' evenings involve parents and girls together from Year 9 upwards. The Connexions service is accessed appropriately, providing good career guidance to older students. Work experience is very well planned for and used effectively to broaden students' learning. Students' achievements are very much valued and celebrated, through newsletters, assemblies, etc., and this helps to guide and inspire them to greater success.

27. In both the main school and the sixth form, it has been the custom for some time to seek girls' views of how well they are doing and of any changes needed to support their achievements. Girls have many chances to complete questionnaires and evaluations of courses and are expected to take an active part in assessing their own progress, which they do perceptively in comments added to their reports. The school and year councils are very active, as are prefects and charity monitors, all of whom influence school life through ideas, initiatives and practical help. Sixth formers take an active part in induction of new staff and pupils. The headteacher and staff make time to speak to every new girl and welcomes discussion of any problems with school life from girls of all ages.

Sixth form

28. The advice, guidance and support students receive are very good, helping them make informed choices about their personal goals and futures, and this programme is delivered through general studies. An impressive feature is the 'Into the Future' day, when more than eighty professionals representing many career paths offer girls a selection of interviews with appropriate feedback.

29. Students value the help and support from teachers very much. They are involved impressively in self-evaluation of their progress in all areas. As a result of consultation with students, new courses in photography and ceramics have been introduced into the sixth form.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school's links with parents are **very good** and make a real difference to girls' achievements. Links with the local community, other schools and colleges, including those related to the school's Visual Arts College and Beacon status, are very good, as they widen the curriculum and girls' opportunities.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are totally clear about the school's expectations and their part in meeting these.
- Strong, businesslike relationships between home and school support girls' achievements very well.
- Information for parents, including reports on their daughters' progress, is very clear.
- Community links enrich the curriculum and girls' experiences significantly.
- Links with other schools support moves to and from the school very well and extend the range of options available to students at different stages of their education.
- A very few parents are unhappy with the school's response to their concerns and suggestions.

Commentary

30. The school is heavily oversubscribed so goes to great lengths to clarify its aims, ethos and expectations in the prospectus and other written information so that parents are in no doubt about what is offered and required in return. Parents know that their support is crucial, for example, to their daughters' regular, punctual attendance and to fund-raising. Their responses to the questionnaire showed a very strong belief that the school is well led and managed and that their daughters are expected to work hard. They are very satisfied with what the school provides, except for the frequency of information about progress and the extent to which the school seeks parents' views. The clarity and quality of reports on girls' progress are not an issue because the school now produces well written outlines of what girls have learned and how they can do better, including astute comments from pupils. A few parents have an understandable concern about the frequency and timing of reports and consultation evenings. The school has tried a number of different timings and, although they do not suit all parents whose working hours stretch well beyond the school day, has found that it has had fewer complaints with the current arrangements. In individual cases, in spite of the school's good record in dealing with parents' concerns, a very few parents still feel that it is difficult it is for them to feel part of the school, especially when things go wrong.

31. A wide range of links with the community locally and further afield, including overseas enriches the experiences available to pupils. Girls are involved in World Challenge projects to developing countries and take part enthusiastically in cultural exchanges within Europe. In addition, the curriculum has been extended at girls' request, to include courses in ceramics and photography. The school is involved in imaginative projects such as providing artists for workshops with local, homeless people and for the local women's centre.

Sixth form

32. Provision for the sixth form is enhanced through the partnership with the local boys' school. These links with the boys' school ensure that sixth formers in both schools have a wider range of options than would be possible on just one site. The school works very well with staff from other schools and colleges so that students are fully aware of all their options and any transfer to courses elsewhere that meet their needs more effectively, is as smooth as possible.

33. As a result of the school's Visual Arts College status students benefit from stimulating opportunities such as those offered by work with local artists and sixth formers visit the local hospital ward to help children there to enjoy artwork. They entertain elderly members of the community and help new pupils to settle into school, which develops their sense of social responsibility actively.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership of the school is **excellent** and management is **very good**. The quality of governance in guiding the direction of the school is very good, but the governing body is not ensuring full compliance with the requirement to provide an act of collective worship for all girls each day.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent leadership of the headteacher and very high quality of management of the leadership group has an enormous impact on the quality and standards in the school.
- The very clear vision for the school of governors, the headteacher and the leadership team is communicated to and shared by all adults in the school.
- The leadership provides drive and direction for raising achievement.
- The governing body is fully committed to making a major contribution to the work and the direction of the school and members work tirelessly towards this end.
- Statutory duties are not fulfilled in the provision of a daily act of collective worship for all girls.

Commentary

34. The partnership between the school and the governing body is very strong. Governors bring a wide range of expertise to their roles and are fully involved in strategic planning and in formulating policy. They spend a great deal of time in the school and know its strengths and weaknesses very well. They provide appropriate levels of support and challenge, not only for the headteacher and leadership team, but also for staff throughout the school.

35. The leadership team and governors place high priority on the recruitment and retention of very high quality teachers in order to maintain the very high standards in the school. This means that they have not been able to provide as many computers in the school as they would wish, but are in agreement with the school development plans for further emphasis to be placed on this aspect in the next two years. Girls take part in assemblies on at least three days each week, but the governing body has not yet found a way to comply fully with legislation to provide a daily collective act of worship for all students. Other aspects of governance of the school are very good.

36. The leadership of the headteacher is excellent and provides drive and direction for raising achievement and has an enormous impact on the quality and standards of the school. The leadership team has created an excellent climate for learning so that the school is a very effective learning organisation. The very clear vision held by this team is communicated to and fully shared by all adults in the school. Throughout the school, excellent role models motivate and influence both girls and other staff. This results in a tremendous sense of teamwork where the major commitment is to the welfare and development of all.

37. Leadership is embedded throughout the school and does not rest solely with the headteacher and leadership team. Many opportunities are offered to girls to develop their own capabilities as leaders, for example they lead and manage clubs for younger pupils, they act as form leaders, charity monitors and so on, all positions which they fill with commitment and assurance.

38. Management throughout the school is very good. Line management links at all levels are very strong, adding to the effectiveness of the strong sense of teamwork. The work of heads of departments in managing their subject areas is very good and is reflected in the very good results achieved in national examinations. The school uses the local education authority documentation in its approach to self-evaluation, which it takes very seriously. It is steadily working through all areas of the documents and involves staff, pupils, governors and parents in its consultations. The strength of the school's use of performance data lies in its identification of the progress being made by individuals and the provision made for individuals who are not reaching their full potential.

39. The school has a good vision for special educational needs and meets the requirements of the statements of special educational need fully. Annual reviews are carried out as required, the school liaises well with outside agencies and is proactive in regard to its obligations to recent legislation. The school has been less effective in monitoring the implementation of individual education plans and evaluating the effectiveness of the teaching strategies used in subjects to meet individual needs.

40. The school's approach to staffing is very good, placing high priority on appointing staff, developing their skills and deploying them to best effect. Systems are flexible and robust; with performance management well embedded and used effectively to improve the school. Systems for the induction and support of new staff are effective and continuing professional development is available for all staff. Links with other schools expand the range of possibilities and a very good aspect is the use of expertise already existing in the staff. Good support systems are in place for initial teacher training where the training experience takes account of the trainees' individual needs. Graduate trainees are valuable additions to the staff and their training is well managed. The school has been very successful in recruiting highly qualified staff and has generally matched them well to the curriculum.

Sixth form

41. Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent. The joint provision with the boys' school ensures a good range of subjects to meet the interests and needs of students. The sixth form team is clearly focused on ensuring that students achieve at their highest level. Subject leadership is very good. Students are carefully inducted and helped through the transfer from main school to the sixth form. The day-to-day management and organisation ensure that ethos is positive and encourages high levels of enjoyment for academic and social activities to support the development of the individual. The sixth form is an asset for the school and students are good role models for younger girls in the school.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,490,203	Balance from previous year	506
Total expenditure	4,375,725	Balance carried forward to the next	114,984
Expenditure per pupil	3558		

42. Arrangements for managing the financial processes in the school are very good. Issues raised in the previous inspection have been addressed and there is now proper separation of duties. The latest external audit is satisfactory and the governors have dealt with the issues raised in detail. The principles of best value are central to financial management. There is no cross-subsidy between key stages in the school. The school development plan incorporates reference to financial considerations in educational planning. Income from additional sources, for example, Beacon School, Visual Arts College, trusts and donations, is all applied to educational priorities and, where appropriate, is made available to departments on a transparent bidding basis.

43. The most significant factor in maintaining the very high quality of achievement in the school is the excellent vision and drive of the leadership which has focused attention on the quality of teaching and learning. Financial constraints are a barrier to this but the quality of support of the governing body and strategic development planning are ways in which the school seeks to overcome this.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results and standards are very high; achievement is very good.
- Teaching is very good; teachers expect and get a great deal from the girls.
- Leadership is very good and management is excellent.
- Marking and guidance for girls on GCSE courses are very good.
- The girls' willingness to work, behave and strive for improvement is excellent.
- Marking in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory, but lacks a common style and purpose.
- In a few lessons, the methods, or their use and timing, do not best serve learning needs.

Commentary

44. Results in the 2003 national tests in English, taken at the end of Year 9, were very high compared to the national average, as they had been for several years. The attainment of the girls when they enter the school in Year 7 is well above average overall. National comparisons show that girls made better progress in English than is the case in schools with a similar pupil intake. In the current Year 9, girls' standards are also very high. Achievement is very good. Work on media, literature and language study is impressive. A strength is in the quality of imaginative and creative writing. Relative to these very high standards, writing is less secure where opinion is being analysed or expressed, when some girls drift into a generalised personal style. Essays are invariably well structured, showing a high level of language competence. Girls across the range of ability are able to comment perceptively on texts they are reading.

45. Achievement continues to be very good as girls progress through the school, so that standards in Year 11 are very high. In 2003, both English language and English literature results were very high especially in terms of the highest A* and A grades. That a third of candidates gained the very highest A* grade in English language was remarkable. Girls performed marginally less well in literature than language. A feature is the way in which higher-attaining girls reach the highest grades and lower attainers achieve good grades. Many have a love of reading and literature. Under timed conditions, they write extensively and accurately, using precise language and varied phraseology. In discussion, girls are skilled in talking to extend and probe both their own ideas and those of others. This enables them to understand significance and themes in literature and how writers create and use them.

46. Teaching is very good. Girls learn to understand and appreciate literature because of their teachers' wide-ranging knowledge. Both essay titles and discussion topics and approaches confirm that girls are expected to think deeply and express themselves clearly and articulately. Teachers help this happen by being very receptive to the girls' answers to questions, from which they take phrases and ideas to pursue. In a very good example, girls in a Year 7 class considered how the advertisement they were preparing (for boys to join Shakespeare's theatre company) could be made to appeal to its target audience. Teachers are very good models of clear, precise, unpretentious language use. They give encouragement and praise for originality, perception and the use of specialist vocabulary. Lessons are very well planned to provide stimulating topics to which girls can respond in a variety of ways. They learn to concentrate and apply themselves to work as a result. In a minority of lessons some methods, including paired discussion, are used for their own sake rather than for their appropriateness to the intended learning. In others, activities change too quickly to allow girls to get full value from them. Much written work is completed, and marking is regular and helpful. The style of marking is too varied in Years 7 to 9, where grades and comments do not relate clearly enough to the English skills being assessed. Marking and advice for girls in Years 10 and 11 is very

good, its relationship to GCSE requirements being a major feature in girls approaching examinations with confidence.

47. The department is organised in exemplary fashion. Administration is thorough and focused, but unfussy. Leadership is excellent and management is very good so that staff share a common desire to enable girls to succeed at the very highest level of which they are capable. The Lady's Close building in which almost all English lessons are taught has some limitations, but does allow an atmosphere of study, stimulation and identity to be created. Girls appreciate the very good range of enrichment opportunities which include theatre trips, anthology workshops, literary celebrations and a drama club. The provision within the English curriculum for girls to use and develop their ICT skills is unsatisfactory. Plans and resources to improve this are in hand. Drama skills, in the form of a weekly lesson, are taught to all girls in each of their first three years in the school and a number would welcome the chance to pursue the study as a GCSE course. Improvement since the last inspection has been good, notably in terms of higher standards, improved assessment, and a wider and more appropriate range of teaching styles.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

48. Girls joining Year 7 have very good literacy skills which the school improves effectively. Few departments have policies for literacy, but all are aware of their responsibility for developing girls' literacy skills. Most teachers appreciate the contribution literacy can make to learning generally, but insufficient attention is given to ensuring the correct spelling of key words or specialist terms. Girls' understanding of essential vocabulary is not always checked sufficiently during or at the end of lessons, particularly as a support for lower-attaining girls. Teachers make very good use of pupils' speaking and listening skills, and are good models of how to develop ideas through speech. Paired discussion is well used in many lessons to try ideas out before committing them to more formal written English. Pupils use Standard English and technical vocabulary very well, because teachers model it and expect it in return. Thus, the quality of debate and presentation in clubs, lessons and form time is high.

English as an additional language

49. The school has a small proportion of girls who have English as an additional language, but none are at an early stage of learning English. Provision is very good. New arrivals are quickly assessed and their needs accurately noted. Wherever possible, support is given in those lessons where subject teachers and support staff are agreed that it would be beneficial. The quality of the support is very good. The school has a very positive philosophy that girls must follow the standard curriculum and be helped to understand the concepts and language within it. Achievement is carefully checked and records confirm it to be very good. The amount and frequency of support is limited by staffing, but lunchtime and after-school sessions are available. Guidance in the staff handbook is outdated and does not encourage teachers to realise the need to be sensitive and alert to the needs of girls for whom formal language structures can be a barrier to learning. A few occasions were noted during the inspection when individual girls were left with linguistically complex work on the incorrect assumption that they could cope, meaning that misunderstandings had to be followed up later.

Modern Foreign Languages

Provision in modern foreign languages is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers plan their lessons very well.
- Teachers' expectations are very high and pupils respond with enthusiasm; time is used very well.
- Teaching is very good, and pupils are enabled to attain very highly.
- Pupils' work is marked in detail.
- Relationships are a strength. Pupils and teachers respect each other and this fosters interaction and collaboration which is highly effective in securing progress.
- Target-setting is not systematic enough in Years 7 to 9.

Commentary

50. On entry to the school, pupils study either French or German. In Year 8 they choose one and often both languages. The attainment of girls currently in Years 7 to in French and German is well above average. In the assessments at the end of Year 9, the percentage of girls reaching the higher National Curriculum levels is consistently well above the national average in both languages. Girls are very careful listeners and are able to talk about themselves and handle everyday situations in the language with little hesitation and good intonation and accent. In Year 9, higher attainers write with structure and accuracy about past, present and future actions and events, giving their opinions and the reasons for them. A small minority do not achieve complete fluency and accuracy, but they are able to communicate effectively. Achievement is very good.

51. All girls continue at least one language into Years 10 and 11. The number choosing two is higher than average and reflects the fact that girls enjoy their work and know they are progressing well. In GCSE in 2002, the percentage reaching the higher grades of A* to C in French was, at 92 per cent, well above the national average, and the corresponding figure was even higher in German. These high levels of achievement were maintained in 2003, where all girls entered for German achieved within the A* to C range. Girls of all levels of ability achieve very well, with value added at all stages as they progress through the school. Higher attainers converse fluently and with impressively accurate accent and intonation. There is little error in their written work and they can read quite sophisticated text with understanding. A small minority has difficulty in working at this high level, but they are able to communicate effectively, if with some hesitation and error, in oral and written work.

52. Teaching is very good, overall, and excellent in German in Years 10 and 11. In the lessons observed, there was no unsatisfactory teaching and the vast majority was good, very good or excellent; in Years 10 and 11, nearly half was excellent. Teachers' planning is thorough. The department is already implementing key features of the Key Stage 3 Strategy, with lessons typically starting with a rapid review of previous work, continuing with a sequence of carefully planned activities which maintain pace and interest, and ending with a plenary summary of what has been achieved. Teachers make their objectives explicit, they explain new concepts with clarity and use a very good range of resources. The teaching of grammar is focused and vocabulary is developed very well. Activities are designed to produce a high level of interaction in class for listening and speaking. Teachers praise good work and show resourcefulness in helping pupils overcome difficult points in their language studies. Assessment is very good; teachers make clear what is good, what is less so and what girls need to do to improve. Teachers' expectations are high, and they support those who need it and extend higher-attaining girls.

53. All girls learn very well. Their behaviour is excellent. They are attentive in lessons and they respond to the expectations made of them, with a determination to succeed. They change from one activity to the next with unusual promptness and readiness of understanding. One feature is that when working in pairs they are mutually supportive, one helping another when a problem is encountered, to the benefit of both. Work is completed to a high standard and invariably shows great care.

54. The department is very well led and managed. Staff share a clear vision about what should be achieved and how this is to be done. Peer observation of teachers' lessons and moderation of pupils'

work across the two languages is a well-established feature. The department has identified the need to continue to develop its work in using National Curriculum levels at Key Stage 3 when setting targets. Their close collaboration has brought to girls the benefits of consistently high quality provision. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Despite the continuing lack of ready access to computers, many pupils have used a text reconstitution package and some pupils use ICT to present their work and use Internet websites as a resource. The accommodation and resources are very good. Rooms are bright and orderly and display celebrates the high quality of pupils' work. Pupils also benefit from annual exchanges with Germany and France, and from a weekly languages club organised by sixth form students.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths

- The quality of teaching and learning is very good as a result of very good planning.
- Achievement is very good.
- The excellent relationships between staff and girls are based on high expectations and a belief by staff that girls can succeed at very high levels.
- The leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Most teachers are very good at developing girls' thinking skills.

Commentary

55. By the end of Year 9 in 2003, the percentage of girls attaining level 5 or above in the national tests was very high. The confident way that girls correctly use the language of mathematics to aid understanding is particularly good. Girls enter the school in Year 7 with attainment levels already well above average overall. The standards currently attained by girls in Years 7 to 9 are also very high.

56. At the end of Year 11 in 2003, the proportion of girls gaining a GCSE A*-C grade was very high in comparison with national figures. The results are improving year on year and standards have improved greatly since the last inspection. Girls currently in Years 10 and 11 are also achieving at similarly high levels. They are able to apply concepts learned in one area of mathematics to another and this contributes to the high standards achieved.

57. All girls achieve very well throughout the school and they show an excellent attitude to the subject. The quality of teaching within the department is very good. The relationship between teachers and girls is excellent and the girls show a genuine willingness to learn. Their behaviour is excellent and they are keen to listen to others. This was shown in a Year 9 lesson on interpreting real-life graphs. The ideas offered were sometimes correct and sometimes unusual but all were listened to with respect and considered by the class. This created a positive learning atmosphere in which the teacher established good working practices.

58. The department reinforces this atmosphere by its organisation, display and the way girls are valued. Teaching and learning were at least good and often very good throughout the school. The teachers' high expectations permeate the atmosphere and are a significant factor in high achievement. These expectations are reflected in the curriculum which has depth and girls are able, and expected to, experience difficult problems. Weaknesses did occur, however, in the 35 minute lessons which were often rushed and had insufficient time set aside for a plenary session. The presentation of work is very good and covers a wide range of topics and shows that the whole range of levels were being addressed within each mathematical area. Teachers place a clear emphasis on presentation of work and showing working out. They are clearly committed to improving the quality of work and have already started to look at more ways to improve the quality of formative marking.

59. Most teachers are very good at developing girls' thinking and this was exemplified in many lessons. This skill was particularly evident in a Year 8 lesson on area where neighbouring girls were given different questions to solve and then expected to mark their friend's work. This encouraged mathematical thinking and stretched the girls' understanding. The department is strong enough to

give time to reflective conversations and a more problem-solving approach to learning which will in turn enhance mathematical thinking.

60. The teaching of basic skills in mathematics is good and enhanced by the numerical warm-ups at the start of lessons which are linked to lesson objectives and help consolidate learning. The use of ICT was a weakness in the last inspection but the department has made very good progress in this area. ICT is used very well as a thinking tool and to develop understanding. All other weaknesses identified have been dealt with and progress since the last inspection has been very good.

61. The quality of leadership and management is very good. Teachers function as an effective team and take responsibility for planning their own teaching; in this department teachers are not dependent on textbooks. The role of the second in department has worked well and her contribution has done much to raise the quality of education for the girls. The school has built a high quality team that includes many young teachers who supply very positive role models. The department is well resourced.

Mathematics across the curriculum

62. The numerical agility shown by girls is very good and meets the needs of other subjects. These skills are evident across the school but particularly so in science and physical education, where girls use measuring tapes and timers with confidence. The teaching of basic skills in mathematics is very good and the Key Stage 3 Numeracy Strategy is being implemented effectively.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Levels of attainment at the end of Years 9 and 11 are very high.
- Very good standards of teaching and learning result in very good achievement.
- Assessment and monitoring of girls' performance is very good.
- Encouragement of girls makes them feel well supported to achieve their full potential.
- Very good attitudes enable girls to learn well.
- Shortage of accommodation and stretched technical support increases the stress on staff as they work to maintain the very high standards.

Commentary

63. Standards are well above average when girls enter the school in Year 7. They make very good progress during Years 7 to 9 and then again in Years 10 and 11 to achieve very high standards at the end of each key stage.

64. Standards in the end of Year 9 tests in 2003 were very high compared to national averages. This level of attainment has been maintained over recent years. Results were average compared to similar schools. Standards in lessons are also very high in Years 7 and 8 where girls were working at National Curriculum levels 5 and 6 in mixed ability classes, more usually seen in Year 9. In Year 9, classes are set by prior attainment levels. The work survey showed that standards were well above average over time, with higher-attaining girls working at level 7 and above in many aspects of their work. Students can explain ideas such as mitosis. They can use genetic arguments to explain the difference between identical and non-identical twins. They can calculate moments of forces. They can use the reactivity series to predict chemical changes and can represent these changes as symbol equations.

65. The standards achieved in GCSE in 2003 were also very high compared to national averages. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are very high, overall. Modular science sets were working at above average levels and middle sets at well above average standards. Higher-attaining girls are producing excellent work, some already at AS level. Students write fluently. They are able to take notes in

lessons and can explain ideas clearly. They apply a variety of mathematical ideas to problem solving, such as calculations on sound waves, thermodynamic problems and drawing and interpreting graphs. They are able to use the concept of bond energies to explain energy changes during chemical reactions.

66. Very good learning takes place because teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to prepare challenging lessons. They ensure that girls have a variety of activities to keep them focussed throughout lessons and use the three-part lesson strategy well. They are very good at organising the steps girls need to take in their thinking so that ideas link together and flow. In a Year 7 lesson on cells, girls had enjoyed making models of cells for homework and had been most creative with their work. They listened attentively to instructions so that they could understand how daughter cells are made. There were cries of 'just five more minutes' as they did a word search using their books to provide definitions when the teacher wanted them to stop to check learning and a quiet cheer when told they could finish it off for homework. Teachers are very good at supporting girls who lack confidence and ensure that the girls with identified special education needs, including visual impairment are working well within their groups. They provide opportunities to improve practical skills and encourage girls to make predictions. Girls react with awe to exciting demonstrations, such as oxygen relighting a glowing splint. Girls have very good oral and writing skills and can express themselves well. They show this during question and answer sessions and group work. In a few lessons, girls did not make as much progress as they might because too much time was spent on one activity, such as a video, without a strong framework for learning. Very good records of attainment are kept so that progress can be checked. Any underperformance is noted and investigated. Girls are also given ways of tracking their own understanding so that they can set themselves targets to improve.

67. Leadership of the department is very good. During a difficult year because of building programmes and staffing difficulties, leaders have worked hard to maintain staff morale. The department had returned to its newest laboratories just before the inspection. Problems with unfinished work remain, causing extra pressure on an already stretched technical team. Twenty five lessons taught outside laboratories also affect lesson planning. The development of ICT has been slowed over the last year because of the building works. The whole team is working hard to ensure that these constraints do not affect attainment.

68. Master classes are provided for all year groups as part of the Beacon programme. The department makes very good provision for girls with special educational needs so that they progress at the same rate as other students. Girls' personal development is very well supported by departmental approaches and opportunities are made available to develop social, moral and spiritual awareness through science.

69. Since the last inspection, teaching has improved and attainment is now very high. A refurbishment programme has started so that laboratory standards have improved overall. The improvement has been very good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in GCSE examinations are high.
- Standards in the assessments at the end of Year 9 are high.
- The GCSE course is being implemented well.
- The programme of study for ICT in Years 7 to 9 is not covered in sufficient depth.
- The management of statutory ICT in other subjects lacks clarity.

Commentary

70. In 2003, almost all girls attained the expected level or above in the assessments at the end of Year 9 and this is well above the national average. However, the assessments do not accurately

reflect that girls have not covered all aspects of the programme in sufficient depth. Girls come into the school with above average standards in the subject. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2003 were also well above average. These results were not as good as those in the previous year and slightly lower than in other subjects. The high attainment at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examination represents very good achievement overall. The standards achieved by girls currently in the school are also well above expectations.

71. The school offers a taught ICT course in Year 7 and a GCSE course in Years 10 and 11. In almost all the lessons seen, the girls made good progress. In a Year 7 lesson, girls produced very effective presentations using PowerPoint. Achievement was good in this lesson since all girls were able to apply new skills. In Years 8 and 9, ICT is taught through other subjects. However, the ICT experiences girls have in other subjects is not monitored rigorously to ensure that girls have a full entitlement across all aspects of the subject. Because of the present structure, specific aspects not covered in sufficient depth include: testing of predictions and discovering patterns and relationships, use of control procedures and macros, girls reflecting on their own use of ICT and that of others, designing information systems and evaluating existing systems. Nevertheless, they make good progress. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is very good.

72. In all of the lessons seen, the quality of teaching was good overall. This effective teaching overall enables girls to learn well. Some very effective teaching was seen in two different Year 7 lessons where lessons were planned and presented very well and this enabled learning to progress at a good pace. In Years 10 and 11, staff provide very effective support when helping individual girls and this enhances learning. Good use is made of on-going assessment to monitor the progress which girls make with their coursework and to encourage them to achieve good results. Most girls in Year 11 can describe what they are doing. Good use is made of support materials in electronic form, but in Year 10, theory and practical lessons are not matched closely enough and girls do not have the support they need to remember details of operations when using software. In Year 7, there is a good system of assessment which is used at the end of modules of work.

73. Overall, leadership and management of ICT as a discrete subject are satisfactory, but the management of statutory ICT in other subjects lacks clarity. The recently established course in Year 7 is providing a sound grounding in ICT skills, but progress in adopting the Key Stage 3 Strategy has been slow and the benefits of the Strategy have yet to influence other aspects of the subject. Currently, there is no department handbook to show how school and department policies are implemented, but teachers are provided with guidance on the teaching of modules of work.

74. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Good progress has been made in implementing a GCSE short course for all girls in Years 10 and 11. The current provision meets many of the criticisms of the last report relating to work in these years. Progress in provision of computers has been good but, whilst the provision of computers is sufficient for ICT classes, they are insufficient when other subjects, with classes of 30 girls, need to use the facilities. Girls have to share computers and the rooms are small and crowded. The school has, however, recently purchased a quantity of lap top computers which can be used in other subjects. Technician support is good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

75. Since the last inspection, several subjects have made good progress in using ICT to support teaching and learning, including mathematics, music, classics and business studies. In some other subjects, such as English, modern foreign languages and design and technology, the use of ICT is more limited. In lessons seen where ICT was used to support learning in other subjects, achievement was always good. Several lessons were seen where mathematics teachers made very effective use of ICT to support mathematical thinking, and a good application was seen in a Year 13 physics lesson on sun spots. The Internet is used well by several subjects, particularly history. Girls use ICT well when required to do so in other subjects.

76. Most subjects now include reference to the use of ICT in their schemes of work, but evidence of its use was limited in the work sample, especially in Years 7 to 9. There was better use in Years 10 and 11 and in sixth form, especially for coursework. Many pupils are competent in their use of

word processing and desktop publishing software, and of the Internet for research. Multi-media software is used effectively for presentations. The use of databases and spreadsheets is limited, as is work on control.

77. The use of ICT in the sixth form is good, overall. The majority of students have a good understanding of how ICT can be used to support their learning, as a result of having followed the GCSE course in Years 10 and 11. Some students however lack some basic skills, for example in the use of multi-media software for presentations and, on occasions, it is difficult for sixth form students to gain access to computers.

78. Since the last inspection, the majority of teachers have followed a programme of training funded by the New Opportunities Fund and this has been successful in raising the level of staff expertise. The provision of resources has improved considerably since the last inspection and is now satisfactory, although much remains to be done to ensure that there are sufficient computers to meet the growing needs of departments.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results achieved in external examinations are very high.
- A wide variety of teaching methods are used in lessons.
- An effective assessment and marking system enables girls to know how well they are doing.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- GCSE coursework is of a high standard.
- Year 8 girls do not have opportunities for field work.
- Girls do not have enough access to computers to support their learning.

Commentary

79. The attainment of girls when they enter the school is above average. By the end of Year 9, attainment based on teacher assessment in 2003 is very high in comparison to national expectations. In GCSE in 2003, 96.4 per cent of girls entered for the GCSE examination in 2003 gained A* to C grades with a very high proportion achieving A and A* grades. This is very high compared to results nationally. Results have remained high since the last inspection.

80. In Years 7 to 9, girls are doing better than expected in relation to their starting points and achievement is very good. In Year 7, there is good systematic progress with basic map work skills and impressive investigation techniques based on the study of local shopping centres. By Year 8, they have a sound understanding of 'cause and effect', for example the Aberfan disaster, which lays a good foundation for more detailed work in Year 9. At the end of Year 9, girls can explain as well as describe physical processes with some confidence. They annotate fieldwork sketches, maps and photographs in some detail and establish quite complex links between deforestation and flooding. In Years 10 and 11, achievement continues to be very good. In Year 10, girls plan routes in detail using map work skills acquired lower down the school and can identify a greater range of landforms from contour lines. They can describe and explain patterns of land use in more detail. In Year 11, the girls' ability to analyse the causes and effects of earthquakes and volcanic eruptions is very well developed. Coursework is of a particularly high standard. Girls are skilled in using a wide variety of techniques, some of which are more advanced than normally seen at this level of study. Interpretation and evaluation of results is thorough. Current standards are high in both Years 9 and 11.

81. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers show very good subject knowledge. Lessons are well planned using a common framework to ensure consistency across the department. Lesson

objectives are clear so that pupils know what they have to learn. Teachers use a variety of teaching methods. For example, in a Year 7 lesson, models, flash cards and map trails were used to teach contours and map symbols, which enhanced the enjoyment and motivation of the class. Importance is given to the management of time and lessons move along quickly. However, when girls are asked to copy notes, the pace slows and there is less progress. High attainers make use of extension material, whilst lower-attaining pupils are helped by placement with more able pupils. Work is marked regularly with appropriate comments as to how they can improve. Homework is set as a progression from lessons, thereby extending knowledge and understanding. Girls are confident with oral work. When required, they use computers competently but opportunities for their use often has to be planned well in advance due to limited access to computer facilities.

82. The department is very well led and managed. Teachers are keen to maintain the status of the subject through further development of teaching methods, resources and extra-curricular opportunities. Teaching and learning is monitored regularly and good practice is shared so that high standards are maintained. The departmental development plan is particularly effective in sharing priorities and detailing action to be taken. Targets are set and carefully monitored.

83. Progress since the last inspection has been good. There is no longer a heavy reliance on textbooks, as other more varied resources are used. Fieldwork has been introduced in Year 9 but there is still a gap in Year 8. The use of computers in lessons has increased but is still too limited overall.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the department is excellent and teachers are highly committed to its work.
- Relationships between staff and girls and between the girls themselves are very good and promote high achievement.
- Teaching and learning are very good, with assessment a particular strength.
- ICT is not used enough in lessons.

Commentary

84. Standards, as measured by the Year 9 assessments, are very high and current standards by Years 8 and 9 are well above average. This represents excellent achievement for girls who enter the school with only above average standards in history. Results in GCSE are also consistently very high and show continued improvement. This represents very good achievement, as most girls build very effectively on previous work and on average achieve about a quarter of a grade better than girls nationally. Girls are trained well to succeed in assessments and examinations and have the ability and the motivation to raise their performance under examination conditions. Girls currently in Year 11 are achieving high standards.

85. Teaching and learning are very good because teachers plan very effectively to provide a wide range of interesting and successively more challenging activities as girls get older. They are also well aware of the needs and different learning style preferences of individual girls. They have effectively implemented the Key Stage 3 Strategy and girls respond very well to the style of work offered in all years. They have an exceptional ability to work cooperatively together and so teachers are able to offer extensive opportunities for well-structured paired and group discussion, which is a very strong feature of learning. For example, in one excellent lesson seen in Year 8, this led to the class discussing and understanding the idea that the actions of Tudor monarchs could be expedient and not necessarily moral. The best lessons all built very well on girls' recall of previous work and added new knowledge and ideas at a fast, but appropriate, pace. Time in both double and single periods is used very well. Another very strong feature is girls' ability to perform well in assessments. Teachers make the requirements very clear and give very good support throughout the process. As a result, girls receive very detailed guidance on how to improve, and act upon it very effectively. A

relatively weaker area in a few lessons was that starter activities were not active enough for girls. On a few occasions, the main lesson activities went on too long to fully challenge girls to do their best throughout the full time of the lesson.

86. The head of department has a very strong vision for the future and has introduced many positive changes in management in her first two years. Evaluation and action planning are very strong and the agenda for continued improvement is appropriate. Teamwork is very strong and all contribute effectively to the department's commitment to continuing improvement in standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good and, in particular, the use of ICT has improved for both girls and staff. For example, it is now used very well via the school Intranet. It is still not used enough in lesson time, but plans to achieve this are good by using the recently acquired laptop computers.

Religious education

Provision for religious education is **very good**.

Main strengths

- Girls achieve very well in response to very good teaching.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- The contribution to girls' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.
- There are no significant weaknesses.

Commentary

87. In Years 10 and 11, all girls follow the core course and their level of knowledge and understanding is well above national expectations. The GCSE course is very popular and in the last two years all girls entered achieved in the higher A* to C grade range, which is very high when compared to national averages. In a Year 11 lesson, girls engaged in very effective discussion on the sanctity of life and how views of the afterlife influence attitudes.

88. Standards in Year 9 are well above the expectation of the Hertfordshire Agreed Syllabus. They are very eager to learn and work very hard. In a lesson on how ordinary people live in extraordinary times, they analysed the effects of actions on individuals and society and considered whether it is ever right to kill. They responded very well to the carefully prepared lessons and high expectations of their teachers. The attention to oral, paired and group work involves them as active learners. They use specialist vocabulary confidently. The match of work to the capabilities of all girls and the help they receive in class ensure all achieve very well. The use of ICT has increased since the last inspection; research from the Internet is edited to fulfil the task and helps independent learning. Homework is set regularly and helps to consolidate and extend learning. Assessment tasks are an integral part of learning and constructive marking helps girls know what they need to do to improve.

89. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and plan and prepare lessons very carefully. Lessons have clear objectives and the variety of learning approaches sustains girls' interest. Every opportunity is given to developing students' self worth and respecting their views. There are good opportunities to reflect on the meaning and purpose of life. The study of aspects of world religions helps their cultural awareness and understanding of how belief influences life-styles. The subject makes a very good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of girls. The opportunities for enrichment with visits of religious significance, visitors and the Year 7 club are very good.

90. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The standards have continued to improve and are now very good. Teaching has improved and is consistently very good. The provision for ICT has developed to enhance the learning of religious studies.

91. Leadership and management are very good. The department has a clear direction and very high expectations for all girls and is carefully monitored. Assessment is consistent and students are clear about how their work compares to national standards and how they can improve it.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in GCSE are very high and coursework is of a high quality.
- Girls achieve very well in Years 10 and 11.
- Girls have outstanding attitudes and behaviour in lessons, which stem from good working relationships with teachers.
- Insufficient equipment to teach computer-aided manufacturing which is a requirement.
- Girls have limited experiences in applying the use of structures, pneumatics and electronic systems to their practical work.

Commentary

92. The end of Year 9 teacher assessments in 2003 are well above the national average. The teachers' moderation process is thorough and accurate. The GCSE results in 2003 are very high in all areas of the subject. The trend has been consistently very high over the last five years.

93. Girls arrive in the school with varied previous experiences in design and technology. All achieve well during Years 7 to 9, with particularly high achievement in food technology and textiles. Some limitations in their experiences in resistant materials lessons and a lack of resources limit achievement in this aspect of the programme. Here standards are not as high as they should be, due to a lack of experience in using computer-aided manufacturing, control systems and devices controlled by computers. In practical work, girls do not experience combining electronic components with graphical materials, plastics and textiles. They are well prepared in understanding designing processes. By the end of Year 11, girls' achievement is very good. The standards of work seen in food technology and textiles lessons are very high, due to the enthusiastic, effective and positive teaching and the regular monitoring of progress.

94. Teaching and learning are good overall. In the very good lessons, teachers shared their high expectations clearly with the girls. In return, girls displayed very high standards of behaviour and attitudes towards their studies. These elements combined to allow girls to make very good progress. The development of literacy is very good, particularly in textiles. This supports all girls very well but especially those who have English as an additional language. The teaching of food technology and textiles aspects is planned very well and the teaching and learning seen were consistently very good in these aspects of the subject. Designing and making products in textiles for Oxfam develops good cultural understanding. Teachers have developed excellent support materials that enable girls to make very good progress. During the inspection, some lessons of resistant materials were less well planned, with too little time given for girls to develop or apply their knowledge through practical work in the lessons observed. ICT is not being used sufficiently in lessons to accelerate progress.

95. Leadership and management of the department are good. The head of department has established a culture of thorough review and analysis of results. This has led to better understanding of how to improve. The department is organised safely and effectively. Since the last inspection assessment has been improved. However, the curriculum is missing some important experiences for the girls. Improvement is satisfactory overall.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art

Provision in art is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management is very strong, demonstrating a clear vision for the department.
- Very good teaching leads to very good achievement.
- Developments made since the school was awarded Visual Arts College status, including links with the community and artists are very good.
- Curricular opportunities have been extended in Years 10 and 11, resulting in a higher uptake of visual subjects.
- In 2003, GCSE results in graphics fell but are still above average.

Commentary

96. In 2003, teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 showed standards to be well above average expectations, with a significant number of girls working at higher levels. This is backed up by samples of work provided by the school and work observed in lessons. Standards in GCSE art and graphics examinations were well above average in 2002. In 2003, GCSE art standards remained well above average, but fell in graphics. In current groups, standards seen in all courses are well above average.

97. The work provided for the girls is very demanding and they achieve very well. In Years 7 to 9, girls learn new skills and make connections between their own work and the work of other artists. A Year 7 class understood the ideas behind the work of artists Yves Tanguy and Fiona Rae, and the girls were developing these into their own imaginary drawings. In Year 9, the work of Max Ernst was used as a starting point for girls' own surrealist bird collages. Girls are able to discuss the work of different artists using a specialist vocabulary. In Years 10 and 11, girls continue to achieve very well. They produce confident, experimental investigations in sketchbooks in an individual way, using a variety of techniques. This work is then developed in many ways in to final pieces.

98. Teaching and learning are very good, and in some lessons, excellent. Teachers demonstrate expert subject knowledge. Their teaching is stimulating, enthusiastic and challenging and girls are engrossed in their work. Teachers plan effectively. Assessment is informative, providing girls with a high level critique of their work and enabling them to understand how to improve and achieve target grades. In Years 10 and 11, girls are able to work independently and are stimulated intellectually by the work set. Discussions between teachers and girls and the girls themselves allow ideas to develop, decisions to be made and enable girls to explain what they are doing and why. There are very good relationships in the classroom and standards of behaviour are high. Girls work very well collaboratively. Homework is used effectively to extend and reinforce what is learned in school. Following the lower examination results last year, the graphics course is preparing girls rigorously for the demands of the examination using the assessment criteria closely. Extra-curricular activities, including life drawing and visiting artists, enrich girls' learning.

99. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department demonstrates a clear vision for art and the whole of the art team, including the technician and the Art College Administrator, shares this. Over the past two years, an enormous amount has been achieved since Visual Arts College status was awarded. There is a huge programme of community links, links with other schools and colleges, exhibition programmes, extra-curricular activities and master classes. This has had a very beneficial impact on the girls' learning experiences. The art curriculum has been extended, and now, in addition to fine arts and graphics, offers ceramics and photography. The art rooms have been refurbished and offer high-quality resources and specialist facilities for the new courses. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

100. Art is a very strong feature of the school's culture and there are many high-quality displays throughout the school. The art department offers training to other departments, who value the visual ethos and incorporate art within their own subjects.

Music

Provision in music is **very good**, with some excellent features.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high at the end of Year 11.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good.
- The department benefits from very good leadership and management.
- The extra-curricular opportunities provided for pupils are excellent.
- Access to computers for girls in Years 7 to 9 is limited.

Commentary

101. Results in the 2003 teacher assessments undertaken at the end of Year 9 indicate that standards are well above the national average. GCSE results are very high. The standards of girls currently in Years 9 and 11 are at similar levels. The number of girls achieving the higher levels at GCSE is rising year on year. Girls are encouraged throughout their school life to improve their capabilities in composing and performing and standards achieved in these skills are very high, with impressive songs, quartets and solo instrumental pieces being amongst the variety of compositions performed by girls at the end of Year 11. Many girls enter the school with above average attainment in music and achieve very well during their time in the school. Examples of very good achievement observed during the inspection included Year 8 girls developing their understanding of the origins of blues music and a Year 9 class working with different types of scales. Year 11 GCSE girls discovered serialism for the first time, being very sceptical about its value at the beginning of the lesson, but an hour later being intrigued by its restrictive style which they were keen to emulate in their own compositions.

102. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers display very deep knowledge of their subject and, along with their enthusiasm and excellent practical skills, are able to demonstrate their commitment to developing the girls' talents as far as possible. Other features of very good teaching are the constant encouragement of correct musical terminology, very good questioning and the excellent use of resources which enhance the girls' learning. Together with excellent behaviour from most of the girls and the strong relationships which exist between staff and girls, a very good learning environment is constantly created so that girls can achieve very well. In some lessons during the inspection, there was a tendency for the teacher to over-direct the lesson, thereby not encouraging the girls to pursue their own musical investigations and questioning as far as they can before teacher intervention.

103. The music department is led very well and managed by an enthusiastic, dynamic and experienced director, who shares a clear vision for the direction of the department with a highly skilled and effective team, including thirty peripatetic staff. The achievement of all girls is the focus of the whole team, and regular monitoring of the standards of teaching and learning takes place, so that there is a commitment from everyone to the whole life of the school and the wider community. Assessment is good on the whole, but not enough emphasis is currently given to discussing National Curriculum levels with girls in Years 7 to 9. Accommodation is satisfactory, resources are good, and well over 300 girls take the opportunity of learning a musical instrument, with many more actively involved in choirs, orchestras and instrumental groups, including a joint orchestra with the Boys' Grammar School. Girls make a large contribution to local charities, churches and old peoples' homes through their music-making, thereby bringing much pleasure to the wider community.

104. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good, with better accommodation, rising standards because the quality of teaching is now very good, and the criteria for assessment being much improved and linked to National Curriculum level descriptors. However, whilst access to computers for senior girls has improved, access for girls in Years 7 to 9 is still limited.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and management are very good.
- Well-qualified staff have very good knowledge and understanding of the activities they teach and are very committed to their pupils.
- Relationships and ethos for participation, where all are encouraged to do well, are very good.
- Assessment procedures are very good, with excellent interpretation of National Curriculum levels in each activity.
- The lack of written policies in the department handbook to reflect the very good practice of literacy, numeracy and citizenship teaching seen in lessons.

Commentary

105. Teacher assessments in 2003 show that the number of girls achieving Level 5 and above at the end of Year 9 was above the national average and a significant number of these were achieving Levels 6 and 7. The standards of work seen during the inspection were generally above average, particularly in hockey, netball and gymnastics. In this latter activity, girls had acquired a good understanding of counter balance and counter tension and were able to create and perform well-planned sequences which demonstrated the difference. The standard of physical skills on entry to the school is generally average, so reaching an above average level by the end of the key stage reflects good achievement.

106. Although the GCSE results were above the national average in 2002, girls did less well in physical education than in their other subjects. This was analysed by the department and strategies adopted to help raise the standards. Results in 2003 are well above average, with over 90 per cent of girls achieving grades A* to C. This represents very good achievement for the GCSE cohort. Standards for the core group in physical education are generally above average, particularly in team games such as hockey. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is overall very good. For example, in a trampoline lesson, despite the fact that the majority of the group had little or no experience at the start of the course, all the girls were able to put together and perform a routine with a variety of jumps and drops, and many girls were able to include a somersault in that routine.

107. Teaching in Years 7 to 9 is good and, in Years 10 and 11, it is very good. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the activities they teach and they pay very good attention to safe practices. Relationships and care for the girls are very good and all are encouraged to do as well as they can in an ethos which emphasises the value of full participation. Very good learning and achievement are the result of good planning, with clear and shared objectives and good use of progressive practices. Occasionally, particularly in the earlier years, teaching strategies are not adapted sufficiently to take account of circumstances such as a very windy day, and in these cases learning is not as good as it could be.

108. Throughout the school, girls' attitudes to physical education are very good and often excellent. They take part with verve and vigour. They make the most of the very wide range of extra-curricular opportunities made available to them, whether they wish to take part just for enjoyment or in the pursuit of excellence.

109. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The team of teachers works together with consistency and harmony and these are the features which produce a secure environment where girls are encouraged to participate and learn well. Monitoring of the work of the department is well established and is productive in helping teachers to develop. The interpretation of National Curriculum levels for all the activities taught is excellent and is used well in lessons to help girls know what they need to do to improve. Assessment procedures based on this are very good although the use of assessment data, for example to inform curriculum planning, is not yet thoroughly established. Cross-curricular issues such as literacy, numeracy and citizenship were included in all lesson plans and very good examples were seen of these in lessons. The department handbook has no written policies which reflect this very good practice.

110. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Standards in Years 7 to 9 have been maintained and results in GCSE examinations are well above average and show a rise in standards achieved.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

The school does not offer any courses within this area.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

All girls follow a personal and social education (PSE) programme. This includes elements of citizenship. Only citizenship was inspected in detail but PSE was sampled. The programme is well organised and the school meets its statutory obligation to teach drugs education and sex and relationships education. The course is well designed to enable girls to develop clear and responsible approaches to these matters. It is also fluid in that it can respond to current issues. For example, it was used to inform girls and allay their fear, about a recent meningitis outbreak. Experts from outside the school are used effectively to enrich girls' experience. For instance, a representative from an outside agency was used to present the topic of sex education to a year forum. Careers education and guidance form part of the programme and are **very good**.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Most of the demands of the new syllabus are being met well within PSE lessons and in other subjects.
- The quality of teaching is good overall.
- Monitoring of the subject is not yet comprehensive enough to ensure that all topics are effectively taught and girls' achievements recorded.

Commentary

111. The standards seen in the inspection were well above average. Girls' written work is competent and they have a clear understanding of the topics they have covered. They speak with enthusiasm and interest when discussing citizenship issues. This represents very good achievement on their part.

112. Citizenship became a compulsory subject of the National Curriculum from August 2002. A deputy headteacher instigated an audit of the school's curriculum. This revealed that many of the demands of the new syllabus were already being met. Many elements of the citizenship programme, such as social and moral responsibility and community participation, strongly underpin the school's ethos already, thus providing a very sound basis for the school's citizenship curriculum. The citizenship conference, which was organised for Year 9, was an effective addition to the school's provision. It provided workshops on a wide range of topics, for example, crime and punishment, making the news and peace and reconciliation. Specialist visiting speakers, as well as school staff, provided expert input.

113. Teaching in most subjects, as well as PSE and tutorial lessons, includes many aspects of citizenship. In addition, girls learn the skills of citizenship through taking on extra responsibilities, such as form leaders and charity monitors. They are encouraged to have their voice heard and are given opportunities to participate in school decision-making processes through the year council meetings.

114. The quality of the teaching in the citizenship lessons seen was good. Within PSE, teachers are supported very well through the provision of detailed lesson plans. Girls respond very positively in their lessons. A good example of this was observed when a group of Year 8 girls discussed the reasons why people should vote and came up with perceptive ideas. The best teaching enables pupils to engage in a meaningful discussion of issues.

115. The new subject has been successfully introduced and its leadership and management are good. A large team of tutors and subject teachers contributes to the teaching of citizenship and, currently, the procedures for monitoring the teaching and assessing girls' work are only just being developed. Contributing subjects have not identified citizenship learning objectives and so do not assess girls' progress. However, the school has suitable arrangements in place to assess specified aspects of citizenship through a series of tasks carried out in the spring term for Years 7 to 9.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 13 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, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Biology	64	98.4	83.5	64.1	36.1	47.2	34.6
Business studies	34	97.1	89.7	61.8	33.3	45.3	36.0
Chemistry	58	93.1	87.5	50.0	39.9	42.2	36.9
Classical civilisation	21	100	n/a	52.4	n/a	45.7	n/a
Economics	31	87.1	86.8	61.3	45.0	41.9	38.2
English literature	63	100	94.9	77.8	38.7	52.9	39.4
Film studies	14	100	n/a	92.9	n/a	55.0	n/a
French	19	94.7	85.5	55.6	35.1	43.7	35.0
Geography	38	100	89.6	86.8	41.3	55.3	38.2
German	21	100	n/a	100	n/a	59.0	n/a
Government and politics	36	100	n/a	68.6	n/a	48.3	n/a
History	38	97.3	n/a	68.4	n/a	47.9	n/a
Home economics	9	100	n/a	66.7	n/a	50.0	n/a
Latin	4	100	n/a	100	n/a	57.5	n/a
Music	12	100	n/a	58.3	n/a	48.3	n/a
Physics	15	100	87.7	80.0	42.8	50.7	38.1
Product design: graphics	12	100	n/a	66.7	n/a	48.3	n/a
Psychology	8	100	n/a	75.0	n/a	50.0	n/a
Sociology	12	100	85.3	66.7	36.3	47.7	35.1
Sports studies	10	100	91.4	100	37.3	60.0	37.8
Religious education	26	100	n/a	76.9	n/a	51.5	n/a
Theatre studies	11	100	n/a	72.7	n/a	49.1	n/a

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	21	100	96.1	81.0	48.7	104.8	87.8
Biology	57	100	91.6	71.9	36.3	98.9	74.1
Business studies	27	100	96.4	70.3	32.8	99.3	76.5
Chemistry	51	100	94.0	72.6	45.9	102.0	81.1
Classical studies	28	100	98.5	89.2	52.0	108.6	88.0
Economics	25	100	96.2	68.0	45.8	102.4	83.1
English literature	41	100	98.5	75.6	43.7	100.0	84.3
French	12	100	96.2	50.0	46.1	102.4	83.0
Graphic products	9	100	n/a	88.9	n/a	106.7	n/a
Geography	25	100	97.1	96.0	40.5	116.0	80.9
German	13	100	96.3	92.3	44.3	115.4	82.1
Government and politics	29	100	n/a	75.8	n/a	100.0	n/a
History	26	100	97.1	92.3	41.0	112.3	81.2
Home economics	10	100	97.0	70.0	31.3	102.0	75.7
Latin	1	100	n/a	100	n/a	100.0	n/a
Mathematics	42	97.6	93.3	71.4	52.2	100.0	84.7
Music	5	100	97.7	100	41.8	108.0	82.2
Physics	11	100	92.8	63.7	42.8	98.2	78.6
Religious studies	25	100	96.3	88.0	44.0	108.0	82.2
Theatre studies	13	100	n/a	100	n/a	112.3	n/a
Sports studies	3	100	n/a	100	n/a	113.3	n/a

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

Provision in English literature is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A-level results are consistently well above average, and improving.
- Standards in Year 13 are very high.
- Teaching is very good because it combines academic rigour with enthusiasm.
- The range and level of debate in lessons are impressive.
- Girls show excellent attitudes, finely balancing intellectual curiosity with a love of literature.
- Some girls are not sufficiently encouraged to propose ideas during class discussion.

Commentary

116. Results in A-level English literature in 2002 were well above average, continuing a consistent pattern of performance. 2003 results showed an increase in the proportion of candidates gaining the highest grades. All students who began the course completed it and gained a pass grade.

117. Present standards are very high. Girls show the ability to extract key points from both texts and tasks, and to use their high-level analytical skills and vocabulary to develop ideas. Many can confidently reference critics' views, often being able to extend, adapt, or reject them. Quality expression of sophisticated viewpoints is the result. Notes are extensive but accessible and relevant, frequently showing evidence of considerable independent research. The teacher made very good use of Year 13 students' research on the relevance of 'The Odyssey' to a modern novel to bring out parallels, symbolism and challenging issues about the author's style. There is a very good understanding of examination requirements, yet pervading all is a sense of the beauty and spirit of literature, and the importance of the informed personal response to it.

118. Achievement is very good. Girls join the course with well above average standards and sustain or improve upon these. Students' attitudes are outstanding. They show a willingness to work exceptionally hard, whether on written or oral tasks. Files of work are highly organised. Dedication to the course, meticulous attention to detail, and genuine intellectual curiosity are features of the work of most students. They enthuse about the subject, write diligent essays and work hard to respond to the very detailed guidance they are given in marking. They show huge appreciation and respect for their teachers' approachability and scholarship. Relationships and the quality of support which students offer each other are excellent.

119. This achievement stems from very good teaching and learning. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge, being able to illuminate and stimulate discussion by apt references to literature. The way in which this is presented is crucial. Teachers make their invaluable knowledge accessible by using precise and demanding technical language which they then explain and exemplify. Questioning encourages personal response, provided it can be justified. Students learn to understand the context to studied texts because teachers are very adept at referencing the social and cultural influences on literature, and its political and philosophical background. A minor weakness occurs when references become indiscriminate and there is insufficient check on the students' understanding of them. A strength in most lessons is the range and quality of open debate and how this stimulates original insights and links. However, some students prefer to listen and take notes rather than put forward their own ideas and teachers are not sufficiently alert to the need to get them to participate fully. Teachers encourage disagreement with their views and are not afraid of admitting gaps in their own knowledge. However, they do not always insist on students' supporting general points by reference or quotation. A very good range of methods, including seminars and joint preparation and research, encourage students to think for themselves.

120. Improvement since the last inspection has been good: well above average results have been sustained and standards have risen. Leadership is very good so that teachers share a clear and agreed vision about how the course should be taught. The central philosophy is one of academic rigour alongside a belief in valuing the individual student as both a learner and a person. Management is exceptional, with thorough checking of student and teacher performance and careful use of assessment to ascertain where improvements might be made. A valuable initiative is the provision of independent study packs for students to encourage wider reading and research, and stimulate deeper understanding of set texts.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

121. Girls joining the sixth form have excellent literacy skills. Teachers recognize this and see the opportunity to use such skills as a central strategy in their lessons. Extended class discussion is frequent, lively and highly articulate. The tone of discussions encourages openness, so that girls feel confident to express original ideas, uncertainty and disagreement. Thinking is respected, expression supported. Girls use specialist language with ease and without showiness. This extends to written work where literacy skills are used imaginatively, for instance in modern languages, history and physics. High-level reading skills allow quick and accurate understanding of deeper meaning and inference in texts.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French was inspected in detail and two lessons of German were also sampled. In German lessons, teaching was very good or excellent. Expectations were high, preparation very thorough and the lessons were characterised by the impressive level of interaction and enthusiasm of all students. Results have been consistently very high. In 2002, 85 per cent of students entered achieved the top grade.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good overall and sometimes excellent.
- Students are confident; they enjoy participating in their work and are determined to succeed.
- Attainment is above average and improving.
- The focus on developing grammatical and lexical accuracy, especially with lower-attaining students, is not always rigorous enough.

Commentary

122. Results in examinations in French have been consistently well above the national average since the last inspection. This standard was not maintained in 2002 when, although all students passed with grades no lower than D, the proportion achieving the highest A and B grades was only just above the national average. This may be attributed to changes of staffing and it should be noted that results for 2003 were far better and well above the national average. Overall, results are well above average. The evidence from lesson observation confirms that standards are above and sometimes well above average. The most capable students are producing work of very high quality in all four skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Those who are less competent communicate effectively and with developing accuracy and fluency.

123. In Year 12, students report that they had little difficulty in rising to the challenge of advanced work because their grounding was secure and expectations in Year 11 were high. They engage in their work with confidence and a 'can do' attitude. They are keen to participate in discussion and there are few reticent students. The most capable students readily understand authentic French, whether from the teacher's voice or from recorded cassette tape. Their oral responses are quite fluent and unusually accurate for students relatively new to advanced work. These students read rather long and demanding texts quite easily and are skilled in determining meaning from context. They write with structure and in detail, and with a sometimes impressive degree of grammatical and lexical accuracy, although occasionally there are basic errors. Those who are less competent are able to gather the gist in listening and communicate well, if with less detail and accuracy. Their written work is distinctly less accurate. Overall, achievement in Year 12 is very good.

124. In Year 13, the most capable students are working at an impressive level. Unprepared conversation with them is fluent and highly communicative. They hesitate rarely and their accent and intonation are generally excellent. In lessons, they help the teacher drive the work forward with their prompt and accurate responses. They do not dominate, however, and all students share equally in the planned activities. The quality of a debate on world poverty was striking in that genuine opinions were expressed with feeling and commitment. Overall, comprehension skills are very good and sometimes excellent. All students can read sophisticated text and use advanced idiom in their writing. The best written work is impressive, with structured argument, accurate grammar, appropriate idiom and little error. Students' writing skills are very good, although the less competent still make errors, some of them basic. Students in Year 13 have good research skills and make effective use of the Internet and library resources.

125. Throughout their courses, students approach their work with commitment and maturity. They know they are making very good progress, they are proud of it and they enjoy their work. Teachers have shown them techniques to help them understand advanced material, and provide them with opportunities to express themselves at a sophisticated level. They relish these opportunities and do not hesitate to seek help when they need it. They benefit from the annual exchange with Aix-en-Provence. Overall, students achieve very well.

126. Sixth-form teaching is very good and sometimes excellent. Teachers have high expectations and they prepare their work very thoroughly. They select topics of interest to their students, such as racism and immigration. They work very hard in planning a variety of activity which secures a balanced development of skills and they make skilful use of a good variety of resources. They are careful to foster a high level of interaction in their lessons. Teachers mark students' work promptly and thoroughly. Assessment is highly effective: students know what is good, what is less so and what they need to do to improve.

127. The department is very well led and managed. Teachers are highly qualified and deployed to their specialist language. Students benefit from the consistency in the clearly established approaches to teaching and learning. The department meets regularly with an agenda which facilitates the sharing of good practice. Schemes of work and other documentation confirm that this highly effective team of teachers is sharply focused on ensuring that the quality of teaching and learning is consistently high. The department has made very good progress in building on the high standards reported at the time of the last inspection. Teaching has improved so that it is now of a consistently high standard.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good overall and is a major factor for the increase in the numbers studying mathematics.
- The standards achieved by the students are well above average.
- The positive relationships between staff and students enable students to make very good progress in a very positive atmosphere.
- Teachers' expert subject knowledge enables them to plan effectively and to make links to other curriculum areas.
- Learning opportunities are hindered as staff are often restricted to teaching in a variety of different rooms without access to overhead projectors or practical equipment.

Commentary

128. The inspection covered the courses in A-level mathematics and AS mathematics provided by the school. Modules are offered in pure mathematics, statistics, decision mathematics and mechanics. The numbers of students studying A-level is high and increasing. They have access to a wide mathematical curriculum and many go on to study mathematically related courses at university.

129. By the end of Year 13 in 2002, the percentage of students attaining the high grades was well above average. Standards have continued to improve and the results achieved in the 2003 examinations were high. The school adds value in the sixth form and students make very good progress.

130. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and enables them to plan effectively. They also use mathematical language expertly to establish and reinforce concepts. For example, in a Year 13 lesson, the teacher's skilful use of reflective questioning enabled students to interpret the results of a line intersecting a circle and yielding 0, 1 or 2 solutions to a quadratic equation. Students were able to use the knowledge of discriminants in algebra and apply it to geometrical situations.

131. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Teachers take responsibility for teaching and preparing their own materials and do not rely on textbooks. They use ICT well to stimulate learning. They have very high expectations of students who respond well to the challenges set. This was seen in well-paced lessons where all were involved. In one such lesson establishing that an integral needs to be expressed as a modulus for it to be valid, a student was so thrilled when this was 'discovered' that she said "Wow! That's so clever".

132. Students' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. They demonstrate positive attitudes to their work and are prepared to admit when they do not understand and ask for further explanation. The quality of relationships between students and staff is a particular strength. Students believe that they are being stretched and expressed their gratitude for the amount of support teachers give them. They felt this applied to the whole department and not just their teacher. The self-supporting relationships between students are also excellent and indicate that they are independent learners not solely dependent on teachers. Classroom discussions are very effective in ensuring that all should understand the work. Students were very proactive in supporting each other.

133. The rooms that are used to teach mathematics do not always have the resources necessary, such as an overhead projector and mechanics equipment. However, the teacher was very versatile and used whatever came to hand including cuddly Koala bears to illustrate impulse and momentum. Students appreciated the humour involved and were able to apply the principles taught. The teacher also reinforced the concepts in a way that students felt that the applied mathematics teaching enhanced their understanding of A-level physics.

134. Subject management is very good. The very good procedures for assessment and for setting targets help students know how well they are doing and this contributes to the progress they make. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

Mathematics across the curriculum

135. The mathematical skills in the sixth form are very good. Students are able to apply numerical techniques in a variety of situations in other subjects. Students are confident in the way that they apply their understanding of mathematics.

SCIENCE

The focus was on chemistry and physics but biology was also sampled. Standards in biology are very high and achievement is very good. In the lesson observed, students had a very good attitude to learning and their work was presented very well. The good teaching included an effective simulation which helped students to understand the forces involved in natural selection.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths

- Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of their subject so they can simplify complex concepts for their students.
- Students have excellent attitudes to their studies.
- Teachers have high expectations of their students.
- There is a well-planned scheme of work for teachers to follow.

Commentary

136. The results in A-level chemistry in 2002 were well above the national average. Results were maintained in 2003 and the standards of work seen in the school are well above average. The achievement of students is very good.

137. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers use their expert knowledge to simplify difficult concepts, such as acids and bases and equilibrium laws. The simple, clear and logical explanations given by teachers enable students to develop their understanding quickly. Teachers are able to respond briskly and accurately to students' queries, as well as providing them with examination tips. Students have excellent attitudes to all aspects of their work and their teachers have high expectations of them and set them challenging tasks. The very good relationships between students enable them to work effectively in collaboration with one another. The very good rapport that teachers have developed between themselves and their students promotes students' confidence and encourages them to have a questioning approach to their work. Teachers provide individualised support for students in lessons. A lot of practical work goes on, which has helped students to develop good investigative skills and improves their performance in coursework. Students demonstrate strong mathematical skills, such as when dealing with logarithmic calculations and manipulating equations.

138. Early work in Year 12 shows an effective approach to promoting successful transition from GCSE standard to A-level. The work seen shows good progression throughout the course. The department regularly tests students, which allows the head of department to monitor progress effectively and, in particular, to spot underachieving students. Well-targeted booster classes are provided specifically for this group to promote an improvement in their performance. Day-to-day marking does not give assessments in terms of A-level grades, but students are happy that the feedback they receive from marking enables them to improve their work.

139. The schemes of work, which the chemistry team have developed and written, provide effectively for progression and consistency. They are comprehensive with a variety of activities included to maintain students' interest and a range of well-researched resources. A detailed revision scheme, which includes individualised support for students, is effective in improving students' examination performance. The chemistry curriculum is enriched by a well-attended chemistry club, lectures at London University and visiting speakers.

140. Both the leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department provides a very good role model for chemistry teachers and students through a calm and efficient approach to all aspects of her work. She has created a strong team spirit that encourages team members to share ideas and support one another effectively. There are secure systems in place to ensure good moderation of coursework marking and effective use of technician support. Monitoring of teaching takes place regularly to ensure consistency of approach.

141. The department is well resourced and the accommodation is good. The current refurbishment of laboratories will ensure that there is sufficient storage space. Displays around the department are eye-catching and, because they are related to current news events, stimulating. Many include useful careers information. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

Physics

Provision in physics is **excellent**.

Main strengths

- Teaching and learning are consistently very good because lessons are stimulating, challenging and up-to-date.
- A-level results are consistently well above average and improving.
- Girls have an excellent attitude to learning. They are excited by the demands of physics and the content of the syllabus that teachers have selected.
- Excellent leadership has ensured that the highest expectations of students' achievements are the focus of departmental development.
- Literacy skills are encouraged at very high levels because of the opportunities provided for extended writing.
- Excellent enrichment provides a rewarding set of stimulating experiences for students.

Commentary

142. Standards in the A-level examination in 2002 were well above average. These standards were maintained in 2003, with an increased percentage of higher grades. Standards seen in lessons were also well above average. In a Year 12 lesson, students worked very hard as they related real sounds to wave models and mathematical theory. They asked searching questions as their understanding developed. In a Year 13 lesson introducing cosmology, they thought hard as they interpreted the movement of sunspots. The written work seen also showed well above average standards. Higher-attaining students worked at very high standards, showing imagination and flare in their work.

143. Students taking physics begin their course with above average standards. They make very good progress during the two-year course to achieve their well above average performance at both AS and A-level.

144. The quality of teaching is consistently very good and sometimes excellent. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge which allows them to plan stimulating and challenging lessons. Students respond extremely well to the variety of activities planned for them, enjoying the immediateness of computer links to current events, such as activity on the sun. Teachers transmit their own interest and pleasure in the subject and make it clear through discussions with students that learning continues throughout life. Relationships are extremely good and create a collaborative learning environment where students and teachers can investigate their understanding with confidence. Teachers produce very good models to help explain difficult concepts. They make excellent provision for a student with severe visual impairment, ensuring that she is able to take a full part in all class activities. Models to help her, provided by the support teacher, have often proved useful to the rest of the class and students have benefited from understanding how to help her learn. Very clear question and answer sessions allow students to clarify their understanding. Often students start to construct mathematical formulae to express their ideas. Students feel that they are prepared well for examinations and understand how to improve. They are aware that teachers go out of their way to follow up misunderstandings, but at the same time give them valuable training in being responsible for their own learning.

145. Leadership of the department is exceptional, providing an excellent role model for students. The choice of the Salter's Horners syllabus has provided an exciting and modern experience for students, with key skills integrated into the scheme of work. This, together with the consistently very good teaching, has resulted in the largest number of physics students in year 12 in the 300 year history of the school. Students combine physics with a greater variety of subjects than usually found, including classical civilisation and French. The management of the department is very good and has helped to raise standards further in 2003, despite a challenging year due to laboratory refurbishment.

146. Enrichment activities include master classes provided through the Beacon status of the school, visits, science competitions, visits to industry and visiting speakers. The range is extensive and relevant, complementing the taught syllabus.

147. It is difficult to comment on improvement since the last inspection, as the previous report made little reference to physics. However, standards have been maintained at well above average levels and there has been an increase in the percentage of higher grades.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

No subjects were inspected in this area.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

Information and communication technology is well used by students, particularly to improve the quality of their written presentations. They are encouraged to use PowerPoint for presentations, Internet sites for research and the school intranet resource. The majority of students have access to computers at home. In addition to departmental and library access, the excellent sixth form centre provides additional limited computer access. There are plans to extend this in the near future.

HUMANITIES

In addition to the subjects reported on in detail, one Year 12 sociology lesson was observed. Standards achieved in sociology at AS level are well above average, but numbers taking the course are relatively low. Teaching is imaginative and well organised, and so students made quick progress and achieve well in this one year course.

Classics

Provision in classics is **very good**.

Main strengths

- Standards in both Latin and classical civilisation remain consistently high because of very good, often excellent teaching and the excellent attitudes of the students.
- There are no significant weaknesses.

Commentary

148. Results in Latin and classical civilisation are high and achievement is very good and shows some excellent features. Students demonstrate excellent skills in literary criticism in Latin and English. They show how authors such as Virgil achieve their purpose, for example using Latin verse rhythm and structure in the Aeneid to communicate character or to express emotion. They translate Latin texts with accuracy, using idiomatic and polished English. In classical civilisation, achievement is excellent. They can explain the difference in poetic style of the satire of Horace and Juvenal. They suggest links with Samuel Johnson's 'The Vanity of Human Wishes'. They show excellent understanding of the ancient world, and thoughtfully apply ideas, for example about the place of women in Homeric society, to their own situation in the 21st century.

149. Teaching in Latin is very good and shows several excellent features, including depth of subject knowledge, strategies which build up key skills through focusing on accuracy in translating texts, and consistently clear marking which enables pupils to understand exactly what they must do to improve. Teaching in classical civilisation is excellent. Excellent relationships with the students lead to a shared learning experience. Teachers are careful not to impose their own ideas. Students respond to the inspiring teaching and the opportunity to work in pairs and groups. They make significant gains in their understanding of new concepts and in their personal development as independent thinkers. Teaching includes effective use of ICT, for example through the use of specialist software.

150. Key factors in the high standards achieved in the sixth form include the provision made in the main school. A steady build up of skills, knowledge and understanding arises from the opportunity to study Latin in Years 7 to 9. Students' interest is engaged by demonstrating the Latin origins of ideas and the names of characters in Harry Potter; and by the 'Minimus' scheme software. The study of Latin and classical civilisation in Years 10 and 11, the lunchtime classics clubs and visits to Greece are very effective in supporting achievement.

151. The leadership and management of the department are very good, with a clear vision of the value of studying Latin and classical civilisation, and the place of the subjects in the school. Both Latin and classical civilisation lessons make a significant contribution to pupils' moral and cultural development, and their understanding of citizenship. Improvement since the last inspection has been good and standards remain consistently high.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Examination results are very high.
- Students are given high levels of responsibility for their own learning.
- Teaching is very good.
- Some time is wasted by copying notes in lessons.

Commentary

152. Attainment on entry is well above average. In the AS level examinations in 2002, results were very high compared to national expectations, with over double the proportion of students gaining either A or B grades than nationally. In 2003, the percentage of students gaining A or B grades increased further, indicating very high standards. At A-level in 2002, the pattern of high achievement is similar. In 2003, almost all students gained A or B grades. Results at both A- and AS level have been consistently very high since 2000. The standard of work seen is well above average, in terms of student knowledge, skills and understanding.

153. Students are doing better than expected in relation to their earlier levels of attainment and progress is very good. Students have efficient note-taking skills and they use a variety of methods to record information. They are confident in analysing detailed case study material, which they use for presentations to demonstrate the impact of tourism in rural areas. Geographical changes and associated issues are well understood. For example, in an analysis of redevelopment patterns in Manchester, students can appreciate and discuss the advantages and disadvantages of the changes taking place. Landscape features and the processes that shape them are well understood.

154. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers often use their expertise to question student responses to promote further thought and discussion. Generally, there are high expectations of the students although unproductive copying of notes slows the pace of a lesson down, resulting in slower progress. A very effective feature of lessons is student-centred learning with clear teacher direction. For example, small groups collaborate and share their ideas with the rest of the class. This also instils confidence and the development of communication skills. Detailed feedback is given to students so they know how well they have done and how they can improve. This is also an important factor in their progress and examination success. Students are encouraged to use the Internet as a valuable source of research material.

155. Leadership and management are very good. The quality of teaching is consistently high as a result of sharing ideas and good practice thereby ensuring that all students receive the same high quality of education. Improvement since the last inspection is good.

Government and politics

Provision in government and politics is **very good**.

Main strengths

- The leadership of the department is excellent and it is very well managed so that the expertise and high commitment of the teachers are used to full effect.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge of the needs of individual students.
- Teachers make the subject interesting and up-to-date so that students appreciate its relevance, achieve an excellent level of motivation and progress quickly in a subject they have not taken prior to the sixth form.
- Excellent preparation for assessment and examinations results in students being fully aware of how to achieve their potential.

Commentary

156. Results in external examinations at A-level are very high in relation to national averages. The number of students taking the subject has increased significantly since 2000, during which time the number of A and B grades gained has risen and in 2003, over four out of five students achieved at these levels. Results at AS level are well above national averages and the trend over the last three years has been very high. This year 55 students took AS level. This is an unusually high number and confirms how well students value the quality of teaching of the subject. Standards achieved in lessons are also high and students make rapid progress, particularly in Year 12 given that this is a new subject area. Students' achievement is consistently very good.

157. Students' learning is very good and sometimes excellent. This is because teachers' subject knowledge is exceptional, as is their understanding of examination requirements. Teaching is always lively, challenging and based on a wide range of up-to-date information and sources. Teachers and students make imaginative use of current journals, ICT and of news media. A very strong feature of lessons is students' ability to engage in constructive and well-informed debate, for which they have been well trained. This is well supported by extra-curricular opportunities in the Government and Politics Society. As an example, in one lesson, students' excellent knowledge levels enabled a ten-minute recap of conservative economic policy to set the scene for a main discussion on Liberal Democrat policy. Three students prepared a high quality presentation with full notes for the class, which was well researched and well delivered. The teacher had ensured this quality by careful preparation with students and by insightful interventions during and after the presentation: these featured praise, humour, pace and challenge in equal measures. These are all characteristic features of the department's teaching. Students are exceptionally well prepared for examinations. This lesson contained many references to how the knowledge gained could be used in a variety of ways to achieve good results. Girls are enthusiastic about the subject, citing the quality of teaching and its ability to 'make sense of the world' as major factors in this.

158. As in the rest of the history department, the leadership and management have had an equally positive effect on both attitudes and standards. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths

- The leadership of the department is excellent.
- Teachers and students build very well on the relationships that exist by Year 11 to produce an ethos of purpose and productivity.
- Teachers have excellent knowledge of the subject and of the needs of individual students.
- Students are prepared exceptionally well for examinations.

Commentary

159. Results in external examinations at AS and A-level in 2002 were very high when compared with national averages. AS level results improved further in 2003, while A-level dipped a little from the exceptional performance of the previous year, but remains high. Achievement is very good as most students maintain a steady rate of progress from GCSE through AS to A-level and numbers of students taking courses are very high and increasing. Hence, well above average standards are achieved by a larger number of students than in most schools. Current standards are always well above those of other schools, and on occasions are excellent. As in the main school, students are exceptionally well prepared for examinations and are generally able to keep their performance at very high levels under examination conditions where others might falter.

160. A major reason for the very good, and sometimes excellent, teaching and learning in Years 12 and 13 is the knowledge and commitment of teachers, and their consistent ability to use these to make the work both interesting and challenging. Another major factor is that teachers have engendered in students an exceptional motivation to succeed. They are able to use this and their high-level skills in organisation, research, and mutual cooperation to produce exceptional standards in presentations, notes and class discussion. For example, in a Year 13 group all students studied and took notes on British foreign policy in the 1920s, with the support of their teacher; six students then prepared two opposing viewpoints on this and presented them as teams, with full handouts given to the class. The teacher challenged during and after the presentations and a very well informed and high-level class discussion followed, which included full reference to how likely exam questions might be answered. As a result, all students made exceptional progress in this topic and were able to use the knowledge gained in a number of different contexts.

161. Another very strong feature is that all essays and assessments are thoroughly prepared and all results are carefully deconstructed so that students are completely clear about what they are good at, and how to improve. As a result, students are very confident in their abilities and have positive attitudes to success in examinations.

162. As in the main school, the leadership and management of the department have had a very positive effect on both attitudes and standards. Girls taking history are very independent, articulate and enthusiastic in their praise for their teachers' support, and this is a factor in the growing numbers taking the subject. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good, notably in the use of ICT.

Religious education

Provision for religious education is **very good**.

Main strengths

- Standards at AS and A-level are well above national average.
- Achievement is very good.
- Teaching is very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- There are no significant weaknesses.

Commentary

163. Standards are well above those attained by A-level students nationally in the key areas of knowledge, understanding and ability to evidence opinion. The recent AS and A-level results continue the trend of rising standards. The 2003 results show very good added value, with students achieving better grades in religious studies than in their other subjects.

164. Students are achieving very well. Very positive attitudes and hard work by students contribute to this. In lessons observed and in the analysis of work, students express themselves clearly using specialist vocabulary correctly both orally and in writing. During the inspection, Year 12 students gave definitions of meanings of key words in Hinduism and were then able to make connections with other key Hindu words showing their understanding. They write effective essays with structured answers due to the careful attention given to the relevant assessment objectives.

165. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers plan and prepare very thoroughly and convey their excellent subject knowledge very well through clear explanations and focused, perceptive questioning. Their challenging expectations produce a very good response from students and the atmosphere for learning is very good. Students appreciate the emphasis on independent and active learning. The provision of school developed unit books that provide a wealth of information, references, assessment information and activities are appreciated by students and make a significant contribution to their learning. The carefully structured lessons help students to understand the issues by breaking them down into manageable-sized ideas. In a Year 13 lesson, the class

analysed the characteristics of Calvinism before considering the extent to which later Calvinism had changed from the original teachings. Preparation for examinations is very thorough and assessment gives all students careful guidance about the quality of their work and how they can improve.

166. Leadership and management are very good. There is a relentless drive to raise achievement. The department works very well together and makes tireless efforts on behalf of all students. Suitable targets are set for students and these are carefully monitored. Results have continued to improve since the last inspection and the subject continues to be very popular. Improvement since the last inspection is very good.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on product design. Two lessons of home economics were also sampled. In these lessons, the teachers provided a very good learning experience where students presented their findings to others in the class using practical demonstration and a PowerPoint presentation. Students were video filmed by the teacher and given grades for their content, visual impact and communication skills. Students were learning very well from each other and the presentations were well above average. Students achieved well and successfully developed their experience in literacy skills, analysis of statistical data and the use of ICT.

Product design

Provision in product design is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in AS and A-level in 2002 were very high and improved further in 2003.
- Students' attitudes are very positive.
- The commercial and industrial aspects of the subject are not given enough emphasis.
- A lack of computer-aided manufacturing equipment limits students' experiences.

Commentary

167. The AS and A-level examinations results in 2002 were very high. In 2003, there have been further improvements. All students following the course gained A-C grades. Over the last three years there has been an increasing trend of success.

168. The current standards of work in Years 12 and 13 are well above average and achievement is very good. In the lessons seen in Year 12, students were in the early stages of their product development, but had made good progress applying the good practice evolved from the production of GCSE design portfolios. They had made good use of ICT to improve presentation of work. In Year 12, research and analysis work is good. Students have realised that to improve on their results at GCSE they need to broaden the range of media used. As yet, none of the students have attended visits to industry to experience first-hand the impact of modern computer-aided design and manufacturing processes. This is limiting their achievement and confining the teaching to the classroom. Similarly, Year 13 students have not had the benefit of working with a real client in a commercial context, which limits the opportunities for feedback and the sharing of commercial standards. Design-work seen in lessons is following a prototype-making approach, for example producing a range of wedding stationary and point-of-sale materials. These are imaginary contexts and they are not sufficiently linked to the requirements of the examination of gaining an understanding of industrial practice.

169. Teaching is satisfactory, overall. Teachers had very good subject knowledge. In the best lessons, students are encouraged to discuss ideas together and had previously experienced mini projects using wood, metal and plastics. Theory work was prepared well, models were used to demonstrate the use of mechanisms and handouts used effectively to give students information. However, in some lessons, time was not used so well and the pace was slow. Students were not given sufficient time to research or explore ideas for themselves or find out through practical work. Teachers set deadlines for work to be completed and students respond to this conscientiously and are committed to their studies. This is having a positive impact on motivation and achievement.

170. Leadership and management of the course are satisfactory. The teaching team has recently changed examination boards to provide better progression routes from GCSE to A-level work. The department lacks computer-aided manufacturing equipment. This is restricting the style and scope of the practical work and is not allowing students to gain the full range of experiences required by the new examinations. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art, but lessons were also sampled in music, drama and film studies. The quality of teaching and learning in music is very good and students achieve very well. Results and standards in drama are very high and students make very good progress. Students display very good attitudes and teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic. In film studies, students achieve very well and standards are well above average. Students are exceptionally well motivated and interested in the subject. A course in textiles has been introduced as a new sixth form subject but no examinations have yet been taken.

Art

Provision in art is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students have very good capacity for independent study.
- Developments made since the school was awarded Visual Arts College status, including links with the community and artists are very good.
- Results in A-level are well above average but fell slightly in 2003.

Commentary

171. Results in A-level in art in 2002 were well above average standards, and have been for several years. In 2003, results fell slightly, with fewer A and B grades. There were no entries for AS art in 2002 or 2003.

172. The work of current students shows standards are well above expectation in art and textiles, which was newly introduced this year. A wide range of curricular opportunities is offered to students and they achieve very well. Art courses include practical work, staff and student presentations, extra-curricular activities, including life drawing, visits, tutorials and working with visiting artists. In Year 12, students on the textiles course had recently completed a half-term foundation course and showed very good progress using a range of materials and processes. In Year 12 art, students use different materials with confidence to develop visual ideas from work in journals. Samples of previous students' work were shown to Year 13 students, leading to an engaging group critique. Students were made aware of what they had to do to achieve high standards and they achieve very well.

173. Teaching and learning are very good overall and in some lessons are excellent. Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject, and demonstrate this enthusiastically to students who learn a wide range of skills using two- and three- dimensional materials. Stimulating discussions about other artists encourage students to evaluate and reflect critically on their own work. Very good use is made of external resources. A group of Year 12 students is working with an artist from the Tate Gallery on a project exploring the expressive analogies between painting and music. Teachers display strong organisational skills and plan effectively, enabling students' knowledge and skills to flourish. Teachers' verbal and written assessments are concise and accurate and this leads to very good student progress. Students are very clear about their own decision-making, and how to progress. They are confident in developing their own individual styles and show depth of understanding and sophistication in their work. Students work very well independently and collaboratively. They are enthusiastic about the subject and actively take part in extra-curricular activities.

174. Leadership and management are very good, and courses are well managed. The introduction of the new textiles course has been very successful. Students have benefited from additional opportunities created by the school's Visual Arts College status and exhibit their work regularly in public. Facilities for ICT have improved greatly since the last inspection. The art team work very well together and meet regularly. Targets are set and monitored. The department has made many improvements since the last inspection, while maintaining its high standards.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education in the sixth was not inspected in depth but lessons were sampled in Years 12 and 13. The school has compulsory PE throughout Year 12. A wide range of opportunities is provided to allow for experience of new disciplines, for the playing of traditional sports and for the opportunity to work towards a nationally recognised qualification such as the Community Sports Leaders Award.

The A-level course has a good take up and students taking this course thoroughly enjoy it because of the very good teaching. Results are well above average. The school does not offer any other subjects in this area.

BUSINESS

The focus was on A and AS-level business but A-level economics was also sampled. In economics, results and standards are very high. In the excellent lesson observed, inspirational teaching was fully grounded in a rapid mix of learning styles designed to meet the needs of different learners.

Business Studies

Provision in business studies is **very good**.

Main strengths

- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and teaching is very good.
- Relationships between the teachers and students are extremely productive.
- The course makes very good use of situations from the real world of business.
- Students begin the subject with no business education background, and most achieve results that are above what might be expected from their GCSE results.
- Constructive guidance and feedback are given on students' coursework.
- Very good opportunities are provided for the imaginative use of ICT by students in presenting their work.

Commentary

175. In 2003, results were well above the national average and, in recent years, results have consistently been either well above the national average or very high. Analysis of students' work shows standards in A-level business remain well above course expectations and students' achievement is very good. The lack of any business education in the main school leads to students beginning the course with much less subject knowledge and understanding than is often the case. During the first term of the course, they move quickly from this base to a point where they have a good awareness of business terms and concepts due to clear and well-structured teaching. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, students were introduced to job descriptions, and quickly moved on to suggesting potential interview questions for applicants for the job. Students engaged with the material with great intellectual effort.

176. Teaching and learning are very good and clear explanations are grounded in the experiences of students. In all the lessons observed, teaching was very clear and built up complex ideas in a logical sequence. Students were given demanding tasks and all were required to engage in discussion. In one lesson, a student gave a very well informed presentation on the changing fortunes of Marks & Spencer plc. The student prepared clear posters, which approached the topic using a framework, based on the six hats method of thinking expounded by Edward de Bono. This led to a

very high level of analysis in which all students in the class engaged. Later in the lesson, the teacher provided students with up-to-date newspaper material relating to the previous week's lesson topic and students were required to annotate the articles for homework. Another aspect of the very good teaching and learning is the focus on how to gain marks in the examination and on how one part of the examination specification impacts on others. In a Year 12 lesson, some students were able to bring understanding gained from their role in a Young Enterprise company.

177. The department's leadership and management are very good. The well qualified and experienced teachers each bring particular strengths, such as an expertise in learning styles or a business background and performance management. Very good systems of self-evaluation have facilitated the sharing of good practice. Students feel very secure in their learning, enjoy the subject and have a clear understanding of how to improve. Their learning is enhanced by participation in a range of visits and competitions. The Young Enterprise companies are open to sixth formers who have not opted for the subject and a company meeting during the inspection was well organised by the students with the assistance of a business adviser. A presentation to the main school in assembly was excellent. The success of students in business competitions has increased the resources in the department, which are good, but students do not have access to information technology in a businesslike learning environment. Overall improvement since the last inspection is very good.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No courses are offered in this area.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

<i>Inspection judgement</i>	<i>Sixth form grade</i>	<i>School grade</i>
The overall effectiveness of the sixth form and the school	1	1
How inclusive the school is		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	2	2
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	2	2
Overall standards achieved		1
Pupils' achievement	1	1
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		1
Attendance	1	1
Attitudes	1	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	1
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		1
The quality of education provided by the school		1
The quality of teaching	1	2
How well pupils learn	1	2
The quality of assessment	1	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		1
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	2	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	2
The leadership and management of the school		1
The governance of the school	2	2
The leadership of the headteacher		1
The leadership of other key staff	1	2
The effectiveness of management	1	2

Inspectors make judgements on a scale: excellent (grade 1); very good (2); good (3); satisfactory (4); unsatisfactory (5); poor (6); very poor (7).

