

INSPECTION REPORT

WESTCLIFF HIGH SCHOOL

Southend

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115339

Headteacher: Dr P B Hayman

Lead inspector: Mrs C Worthington

Dates of inspection: 19th – 22nd January 2004

Inspection number: 259318

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar (selective)
School category:	Foundation
Age range of pupils:	11-19
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll:	1,032
School address:	Kenilworth Gardens Westcliff-on-Sea
Postcode:	SS0 0BS
Telephone number:	(01702) 476 026
Fax number:	(01702) 471 328
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Chairman of governors:	Mrs J Crowe, JP
Date of previous inspection:	6 th October 1997

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Westcliff High School for Girls is a grammar school which has recently achieved specialist status as a Science and Engineering College. It is about the same size as other secondary schools. Its pupils are selected from both the local area and further afield. Eighty per cent are white British; others are mostly British Asian, including Chinese. All speak English fluently. The percentage eligible for free school meals is well below average (1.6 per cent). The percentage of girls with special educational needs is well below average at 1.25 per cent; two have statements. As well as being a designated recommending body (DRB), the school has received many awards. It is a Beacon School and received a Healthy Schools award in 2003 and in 2002 a Schools Achievement award and ROQA (recognition of quality achievement) for work experience involving pupils younger than 16. It takes part in the Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme, Project Trident, Young Enterprise and World Challenge. Attainment on entry to the school is above average. There is also shared accommodation for music and the canteen with the boys' school on the same site. Westcliff has a larger than average sixth form; a few of the entrants from other schools at this level are boys.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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4486	Michael Weller	Team inspector	English; English as an additional language
23340	Graham Ambridge	Team inspector	Mathematics
25743	Peter Butler	Team inspector	Science
20729	James Berry	Team inspector	Biology; Chemistry (6 th form)
18261	Tony Hill	Team inspector	Art; Special educational needs
4615	Michael Bostock	Team inspector	Information and communication technology
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24026	Celia Holland	Team inspector	Music
13805	Lynn Lowery	Team inspector	Design and technology
3238	Keith Simmonds	Team inspector	Design and technology (6 th form)
27226	Richard Cribb	Team inspector	Physical education; History
14841	Michael Duffey	Team inspector	History (6 th form)
23552	Ian Whitehouse	Team inspector	Geography
2626	Marion Thompson	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
32150	Kerrigan Redman	Team inspector	Citizenship
15971	Michael Pye	Team inspector	Vocational subjects

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very good school which has many outstanding features including very high standards in academic work. Girls achieve very well because of the very good and often excellent teaching they receive and their own high aspirations, engendered by the school's ethos in which excellence in all areas is valued. Leadership and management of the school are very good. The new headteacher has a clear vision for the future development of the school in its newly acquired specialist status and is very well supported by his senior managers. The school provides very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- very good teaching and learning, with outstanding practice in mathematics, art, and religious studies;
- a very good, wide and varied curriculum which meets the needs of all girls very well;
- girls' excellent attitudes to learning and behaviour;
- a very good sixth form;
- very good provision for the gifted and talented;
- its excellent work as a Beacon School;
- very good pastoral care and guidance;
- unsatisfactory accommodation for English; and
- limited access to information and communication technology (ICT) facilities for cross-curricular work.

The school has made very good improvement since the last inspection. All the key issues have been addressed and statutory requirements met. There has been particularly good improvement in provision for religious studies and ICT. High standards have been maintained and the school sets and meets higher targets each year. Teaching has improved from good to very good and leadership and management remain very good. The school is very well placed to make further improvements, particularly in its newly acquired specialist status.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

Key: A - very high; 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.

The school's performance in external examinations is outstanding. Girls enter the school with above average capability and are regularly leaving with standards in the top five per cent of the country (A*). Girls achieve very well in Years 7 to 9 and achieve a similarly high standard in their Year 9 National Curriculum tests. Nevertheless, they still manage to improve at an above average rate between Years 9 and 11 compared with similar schools.

In the sixth form, standards are again in the top five per cent in the country for A and AS level; achievement is also very good overall despite many students starting afresh with subjects that they have not studied at GCSE.

Work seen during the inspection was well above average throughout the school, with particularly high standards seen in religious studies in every year, history, design and technology, music and physical education in Years 10 and 11 and art in the sixth form. Slightly lower standards were seen

in music and German in Years 7 to 9, but standards improve as girls go through the school. There is every indication that girls' examination performance will reach similar high levels in the current year.

Girls' **personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development** are **very good**. Their moral and social development, in particular, is excellent. Their **attendance** is **very good** and their **attitudes** and **behaviour outstanding**. Punctuality is good but some girls occasionally arrive late in the morning because of problems with school buses. Lessons start on time.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The **quality of education provided by the school** is very good. Girls benefit from very good **teaching** with some excellent, particularly in religious studies, mathematics, ICT, English and art. The highest proportion of excellent teaching was seen in the sixth form. Particular strengths are in the expertise of teachers and their very high expectations of their pupils, who learn very well because of this and their outstanding capacity for study. The school provides a very good broad and balanced curriculum relevant to the needs of the school's pupils, who also benefit from the many opportunities provided to enrich the taught curriculum. The school provides very good pastoral care; it supports and guides girls very well in all aspects of school life so that all are given every opportunity to succeed. The school enjoys good partnerships with parents and has very good links with other schools and the community through its being a DRB (a designated recommending body) and a Beacon School and one that enjoys specialist status.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are very good. Senior staff and academic and pastoral managers are very effective and this contributes to the school's success. The previous headteacher led the school through very good improvement since the last inspection and the smooth transfer of leadership to the new headteacher has ensured that the school is now poised to succeed in its new role as a Science and Engineering College. **Governance** is good; governors continue to be very supportive of the school. They are highly involved with the school's development planning and monitor the finances very effectively.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents who responded to the inspection questionnaire and attended the parents' meeting were overwhelmingly positive about the school. A few thought that their daughters were given too much homework. Inspectors found that homework extends the curriculum well and that, if planned, is not excessive for a grammar school. Reports, however, frequently do not clearly indicate girls' strengths and weaknesses and how improvements could be made. Girls themselves are also completely positive about the school; it fulfils their desire to learn and do well in a friendly and very supportive community.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The most important things the school should do to improve are:

- Provide suitable accommodation for English and other subjects, which have to use the present unsatisfactory de-mountable huts;
- improve subject access to ICT facilities for all by overcoming timetable and resources constraints;

and to meet statutory requirements:

- the governors must include examination results in their reports to parents and give more information on special educational needs.

THE SIXTH FORM AT WESTCLIFF HIGH SCHOOL

The sixth form caters for 273 students and provides a wide range of academic courses.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form is very effective; it provides an outstandingly good standard of education for its students. Teaching is very good and very often excellent.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Teachers have a very high level of expertise and expect all students to achieve their best.
- Gifted and talented students do very well and use their talents to help younger girls.
- Sixth-formers take responsibility for leading many activities in the school.
- Students are prepared very well for higher education and careers, but initial induction to the sixth form could be developed further.
- Sixth-formers have excellent attitudes to their work and are determined to succeed.

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.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Very good. Teaching and learning result in very high standards and very good achievement in English. In French, written language is better than the spoken.
Mathematics	Very good. Students achieve success through very good teaching and their own eagerness to learn and succeed.
Science	Very good provision for chemistry and biology ensures all round success. Physics was not inspected.
Information and communication technology	Very Good. Attainment in ICT is well above the national average. Teaching is very good. Students' achievement is very good.
Humanities	Provision for religious studies is excellent. The standard of students' work is exceptionally high; teaching, learning and achievement are all excellent. Provision and standards in history and geography are very good with highly qualified and experienced teachers who guide students very well. Psychology was not inspected.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Good provision in design and technology. Standards achieved are well above average and improving.
Visual and performing arts and media	Very good standards in art, with excellent leadership and teaching that ensures that students do very well.
General education	Government and politics have very good standards and achievement which are the result of high quality teaching, very positive student attitudes and very good leadership of the subject.

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

Students receive very good academic and pastoral support which enables them to achieve very high standards and fulfil their potential.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management are very good; the sixth form is very cost effective. The respective heads of Year 12 and Year 13 bring different strengths to the leadership team which is led by the very able head of sixth form.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

They have positive views about the school. They believe it satisfies their needs and prepares them well for their futures.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AND STUDENTS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

The school's performance in external examinations is outstanding. Girls enter the school with above average capability and are regularly leaving with standards in the top five per cent in the country.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Outstanding results in external examinations over the last three years at all stages.
- Very good achievement throughout the school.
- An ethos where high achievement is valued.
- Excellent achievement in religious studies throughout the school and in design and technology in Year 11.
- Very high standards in religious studies, history and art in the sixth form.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	43.3 (42.7)	33.4 (33.3)
mathematics	47.1 (47.1)	35.4 (34.7)
science	41.9 (43.5)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 149 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

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	100 (99)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	54.6 (55.5)	35.5 (34.7)

There were 143 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

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	99.3 (99.0)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	58.5 (66.8)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per pupil	365.8 (415.0)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 130 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

Commentary

1. The school's performance in public examinations is outstanding. For the past three years, results have been in the top five per cent in the country for English, mathematics and science in Year 9; in 2003, compared with the prior attainment of the pupils in junior schools, results were above average overall and well above for English. The science results fell slightly in that

year. The school has already put in more examination preparation in this subject for the current Year 9 to ensure that the results this year reach their previous high level.

2. The school's intake is in the top 25 per cent of the ability range. Attainment on entry is above average, although there is wide variation in the ability of pupils, confirmed by the scores achieved by the girls in cognitive tests taken during their first year in school.
3. Achievement is very good from Years 7 to 9, due to the very good teaching that the girls receive in all subjects. In English, mathematics and science, the above average National Curriculum levels of the girls on entry are consolidated and improved upon; at the end of Key Stage 3, they achieve very high results in the National Curriculum tests for 14 year-olds. In English and mathematics, the girls do particularly well, with 72 per cent of them achieving two levels higher than expected in English and 93 per cent doing so in mathematics. In lessons seen, inspectors judged that much of the work being done in Key Stage 3 was already of a standard that would achieve a good GCSE grade in these subjects.
4. Attainment is also high in other subjects in Key Stage 3. In religious education it is particularly so, with excellent achievement and very good improvement since the last inspection when attainment was below that expected in a grammar school. In music, attainment is average in Key Stage 3, largely due to the lack of emphasis on composing and too much insistence on theory work. In modern languages, achievement is not as high as in the rest of the school because there is not enough speaking in the language being studied; written work is much better than spoken language.
5. At Key Stage 4, GCSE results are very high. One hundred per cent of girls gained five or more A* to C grades in 2003, compared with 53 per cent nationally. The average points score was 20 points above the national average and in all subjects, girls gained grades significantly higher than those achieved nationally. Fifty-five per cent gained A* or A grades overall. Particularly high results were achieved at A*/A grades in mathematics, art, science, design and technology, French, ICT and religious education. Even those subjects gaining less outstandingly saw grades well above average. Since the girls entered the school with attainment in the top 25 per cent, they achieved very well to gain these results that are in the top five per cent in the country.
6. During the inspection, standards of attainment seen were well above average and achievement very good. Key skills of literacy, numeracy and ICT develop very well to underpin achievement throughout the curriculum. The high standards are built on at Key Stage 3 and extended in Key Stage 4. In music and design and technology, achievement is excellent in Key Stage 4; in French and German, it is very good in written work and good in spoken language. The very high standards are achieved because of the very good and often excellent teaching and also because of the ethos where high achievement is valued, the girls vying to do better than their friends. Striving for excellence is something that the school works very hard to maintain. Girls receive first class support and guidance from staff, enabling all to succeed.
7. Pupils with special educational needs generally achieve as well as others in their classes. They achieve particularly well where they benefit from the support of a teaching assistant, but where this is not possible, the class teachers know the girls well and make a special effort to adapt teaching to ensure that they are fully included in the lesson.

Sixth form

8. Standards are similarly high, and achievement very good – often excellent. Many students take subjects for which their GCSE results, although very high, have not prepared them fully. Many girls take up subjects at A level, such as drama, economics, business studies, psychology and government and politics, which they have not studied at GCSE. They make very good progress and achieve results of the highest calibre, due to the excellent expertise of their teachers and their own first-rate attitudes to learning and desire to succeed.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

This aspect is a strength of the school. Girls' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good. The level of attendance is well above average and punctuality is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attendance is very high.
- Girls show excellent attitudes to lessons and extra-curricular activities.
- The behaviour in lessons and around the school is impeccable.
- There is an impressive number of girls who help others in school and the community.
- Girls are developing very good self-knowledge and spiritual awareness.
- Moral standards are excellent and girls show a very good appreciation of the religious and cultural diversity of the world today.
- There is excellent racial harmony and a very strong community spirit continues throughout the school.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.3	School data	0.2
National data	7.2	National data	1.1

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

Commentary

9. Attendance has continued to be well above average because girls want to come to school because it is friendly, stimulating and a good place to learn; parents strongly support the school's efforts to maintain a very high level of attendance. Parents are very good at reporting any absences and rarely take their daughters out of school for unacceptable reasons - hence the very low amount of unauthorised absence. Attendance is very well monitored and strongly promoted with awards for those who achieve very high levels. Punctuality is good but some girls occasionally arrive late in the morning because of problems with school buses.
10. Girls' attitudes are excellent because they enjoy being at school and value the very good teaching they receive. Coupled with their own very high levels of self-motivation and ability to concentrate and persevere, this strongly encourages them to work hard to achieve the very highest standards. The excellent relationships between the girls themselves and with staff - strongly promoted by the school - enable everyone, whatever their background and ability, to aim high.
11. Girls show a mature and sensible approach to their work and their behaviour in lessons and around the school is exemplary because of the strong ethos of the school and the very high expectations of staff. They listen well, respect others' opinions and speak confidently and sensibly. There were a few fixed term exclusions last year but that is unusual. Girls do not see bullying as a concern because there is zero tolerance towards it and any incidents that are reported are dealt with effectively.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Categories used in the Annual School Census
White – British
Others

No. of pupils on roll
807
225

Exclusions in the last school year

Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
3	0
0	0

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

12. Assemblies and discussions on the various 'Thoughts for the Week' provide very good opportunities for reflection. During the inspection, the theme of 'diversity' was explored very well by using the wide range of experiences and religious faiths and cultural backgrounds of many of the pupils. This strongly promoted girls' spiritual and cultural development. Girls' self-awareness continues to be strongly promoted through religious education studies, which they all study to GCSE level, as well as other subjects, such as drama and art and through visits. The recent Year 10 visit to Ypres to see World War I war graves demonstrated this well. The large numbers applying for World Challenge and Duke of Edinburgh Awards show the girls' strong interest in fundamental issues.
13. The strong sense of being part of a friendly, very supportive and happy community is strongly promoted by the school and valued by all its members. All Year 8 girls are enrolled as 'sisters' and Year 11 as 'aunties' to support and help those in Year 7 to settle into school. Many additional volunteers enthusiastically help other girls in the pastoral support group, 'CHIPS' and act as sixth form listeners and prefects, and represent others in their form, year and on the school council. The number of girls participating in the wide range of extra-curricular activities provided is very high.
14. Girls' social development and ability to work collaboratively is excellent because many opportunities are provided for them to work together, share experiences and learn from one another in lessons and extra-curricular activities. They enjoy working together and benefit from it significantly. The many peer-support systems and the house system provide a very good opportunity for girls of all ages to meet and work together, and strengthen the community spirit and their personal development. Girls are also developing good skills at working independently.
15. Girls show excellent moral standards because they are promoted effectively by the example of the staff and through lessons and other activities. This gives the girls a strong sense of justice and an understanding of what is right and wrong.
16. The school celebrates the wonderful cultural and religious diversity of its pupils by using them to explain their experiences and beliefs. It provides a special room for Muslim girls to pray. This results in all girls having a very good understanding and appreciation of diversity with the result that racial harmony in the school is excellent. Girls are developing a very good awareness of cultural diversity through the subjects they study, visits at home and abroad, community work provided through Trident and the Duke of Edinburgh Awards scheme, visitors who come into school and events, such as multicultural days.

Sixth form

17. Most students attend well and all complete their courses. Attendance is well monitored and any concerns are followed up. Students show excellent attitudes towards school and their work. They have very high aspirations and show a strong determination to achieve the demanding targets for achievement they set themselves in collaboration with the school. They study subjects they enjoy and see them as helping them to achieve their goals of employment or entrance into higher education. Behaviour is excellent with very strong relationships

between students and with staff, where mutual respect and understanding are achieved. The strong sense of community seen in the main school continues in the sixth form with students new to the school embracing the strong ethos of the school wholeheartedly.

18. Students' willingness and enthusiasm to take on many roles and responsibilities to help others within the school, such as running the annual charity week events and the school houses, leading the School Council, helping staff as prefects and helping younger pupils, for example, as 'listeners', is very impressive. They also organise and run a number of extra-curricular activities and provide very good role models for younger girls. This work strongly promotes their social and moral development, gives them confidence, promotes their independence and gives them skills of leadership.
19. Students' self-awareness and spiritual development are promoted well through their studies and the experiences they gain from their significant involvement in many activities. The planned two day courses, for example on ethics, as part of the provision for religious education, provide further food for thought and reflection. The sixth form choice to support 'AVERT', a charity for HIV education in Africa, for the school's recent charity week shows a care for third world issues.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education is very good. Teachers have excellent expertise and very high expectations. The curriculum is very good with a wide variety of academic subjects which suits the school's pupils.

Teaching and learning

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have first class subject expertise.
- Ninety per cent of lessons observed were good or better – 96 per cent in the sixth form.
- Girls come to school wanting to learn and to succeed.
- Assessment is very good.
- Literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are developed well, but teachers in some subjects find access to computers limited.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 176 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
18 (10.2%)	76 (43.2%)	64 (36.4%)	18 (10.2%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

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

Commentary

20. Teaching and learning are very good throughout the school, with many outstanding features that lead to the very high standards achieved by the school. Of the lessons seen during the inspection, none was unsatisfactory and over half were very good or better.
21. Teachers are all specialists in their field and have excellent subject expertise, so girls learn from experts, many of whom are highly regarded professionally outside the school. Teachers have high expectations of the capabilities of their pupils and the work they do as a result is also of a high standard. In a Year 10 dance lesson, for example, very complicated routines were carried out as girls met successive challenges set by their teacher.

22. In English and mathematics, teachers challenge their pupils extremely well. When introducing 'An Inspector Calls' to a Year 11 English class, for example, high expectations were clearly established. Girls picked up the enthusiasm of their teacher who described a recent National Theatre interpretation of the play; there followed an excellent development of vocabulary upon which to base further study of the play. In mathematics, teachers' expertise and high expectations result in girls learning at such a high level that a large proportion is accelerated into taking GCSE early and starting AS work in Year 11.
23. Teachers work very hard to plan lessons to match the wide range of girls' ability and because of this, all girls achieve very well. In some subjects, such as modern languages and mathematics, girls are put into ability sets to enable planning to be precisely focused on a narrower ability range, but in many classes, the ability of the pupils is mixed. Teachers usually plan extension work for the most able, though this is not always the case. In a Year 10 science lesson, for example, the teacher made too little use of extension work to challenge girls of higher ability further. In most lessons, particularly in the sixth form and in Years 7 to 9, there is an emphasis on independent learning.
24. Teachers have very good control and management in their classes; they do not tolerate any behaviour which is not conducive to learning. Consequently, the desire most girls have to succeed and their excellent behaviour carry along those who are slightly less able by the ethos of hard work present in the school. Girls with special educational needs, which are mainly physical or emotional and behavioural, are given very good guidance by their teachers and learning support assistants and this enables them to succeed and make very good progress, similar to the rest.
25. Teaching methods are good; most lessons start briskly with a 'starter' activity. Virtually all lessons at some stage include a discussion where girls express their mature points of view on, for example, the problems facing the Allies at Versailles or comparing life in under- and highly-developed countries with each other. Some good opportunities are provided for practical work in science, whether calibrating an unmarked thermometer in Year 12 physics, or building 'Dinomech' robots in Year 8, introduced to enhance the school's status as a Science and Engineering College. In music, however, there is too little practical work in Key Stage 3. Much of the composition is done theoretically. In a lesson on composing Indian music, girls spent far too long writing the music that they were unable to listen to and did not achieve the objective of improvisation.
26. The majority of teachers know the girls with special educational needs well, through information provided by the special educational needs co-ordinator. They keep track of their progress in lessons to ensure they are not disadvantaged by their special needs. In a small number of instances, teachers do not fully adapt their teaching methods and curriculum resources; individual education plans (IEPs) are not always utilised effectively in the teaching and learning process. The qualified teaching assistant, employed by the local authority to support girls who have the legal protection of a statement of special educational needs, knows these girls particularly well and gives very good, sensitive support to them in lessons. She plans lessons with the class teachers involved and keeps a detailed 'learning support record' on the pupils' progress in lessons. Target girls benefit considerably from her support and make similar progress to others in lessons.
27. Teachers expect girls to have a high standard of English literacy because of the degree of understanding necessary for the entrance examination. There is no significant difference in standards of literacy between girls from ethnic minorities, some of whom are bilingual, and the majority of the pupils. However, in modern foreign languages, girls' speaking and listening do not develop as well as their written work. Numeracy is well developed in science, design and technology. Skills in ICT are well developed in several subjects, such as economics and business studies and computer-aided design in design and technology lessons. In other subjects, however, teachers do not have sufficient access to computers; ICT is developed less well in English and geography, for example.

28. Some parents thought that their daughters are set too much homework – sometimes for its own sake. Inspectors found that in all cases observed, homework was not excessive, given the type of school this is. Homework extended the curriculum and the girls benefited from this.
29. Assessment is very good. Teachers mark work very thoroughly and give their pupils very good guidance, which enables them to make further improvements in most subjects. In art, every project is graded, and very good use is made of self- and peer-evaluation and this results in very high standards of work. In all subjects, regular testing occurs, at least half-termly. Senior managers regularly check the thoroughness of marking and assessment. The 'Assessment Manager' database is held centrally and is readily accessible in all departments; it is regularly updated. A complete record is held of girls' attainment from entry throughout their time at the school and all staff are given training on its use when they join the school so that every teacher can keep a check on their pupils' progress. Pastoral data are also kept for each girl. This system is instrumental in enabling subject teachers, pastoral staff and school managers to know every girl well and to monitor her achievements so that intervention can be put in place if necessary.
30. The assessment system allows for very thorough monitoring of girls' academic progress. Use of data is meticulous and allows for the monitoring of individual teachers' work through their pupils' achievements. The system also allows for adjustments of the curriculum in certain courses as significant underachievement can be picked up and rectified, as can homework issues. A slight shortcoming lies in the lack of use of National Curriculum level descriptors which apply only at the end of Key Stage 3. For the majority of girls they have little significance – particularly in the core subjects – because work is well above the expected levels from early on in the key stage. However, there are inaccuracies and some misgrading in Year 9 in certain subjects, especially music and modern foreign languages.

Sixth form

31. In the sixth form, teaching is particularly strong because the extremely well qualified staff extend students' learning to a very high level. Most lessons were very good or better. Specialist teaching in almost all subjects continued from Year 11 is very good, such as in physics, chemistry and biology, though it is not quite so good yet in design and technology. It is outstanding in religious studies and art. In subjects new to the sixth form, teaching is very good in government and politics and good in psychology and business studies, though it is sometimes too didactic in these two subjects. Assessment in the sixth form is very good and used very well to set challenging targets which ensure that students achieve their full potential.

The curriculum

The school provides a very good, wide and varied curriculum. Opportunities for enrichment through extra-curricular activities are also very good. Accommodation and resources are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum fully meets statutory requirements including provision for religious education and collective worship.
- Examination results confirm that the curriculum is highly effective in meeting the needs of the school's selective intake.
- The range and take-up of extra-curricular activities are very good.
- Resources for learning are generally satisfactory but in many lessons pupils and teachers lack ready access to ICT resources.
- Poor accommodation for English and psychology.

Commentary

32. This aspect of the school's provision is highly effective in that pupils receive their full statutory entitlement in a broad, balanced and well-sequenced curriculum. The school's governing body and leadership team have responded very positively to the weaknesses identified in the last report. Omissions in information and communication technology (ICT), religious education, design and technology and music have all been put right. In religious education, the school has gone from non-compliance with statutory requirements to outstanding success. The school has also put in place a programme of 'thoughts for the day'. Girls now receive a thoughtful input at the beginning of the school day either in their form rooms or in assembly. A few moments of silent reflection follow and provide them with the opportunity for an act of collective worship. Girls say that they find drama in Year 7 valuable in developing their confidence and that they miss it in Years 8 and 9.
33. In Years 10 and 11, girls follow academic GCSE courses, all provided within the school. They continue with the core subjects and take five options. The school has planned its provision coherently to ensure continuity with previous years and the subsequent sixth form. Examination results confirm that the curriculum is highly effective in meeting the needs and aspirations of the school's selective intake. At present, all girls take double science but the school plans to make separate sciences available next year. Also, in order to move the curriculum further towards its new specialist status, the school plans to introduce a vocational course in engineering.
34. The provision for the very small number of girls on the special educational needs register is good. Information is gathered by the special education needs co-ordinator from contact with feeder primary schools. She attends annual reviews of Year 6 girls who have a statement of special educational need and have been selected to join Westcliff High School; she also attends the annual reviews of Year 11 girls who are due to transfer from other schools into the Westcliff sixth form. Test information is tracked from Year 6 and girls who are deemed to be in need of special support are placed on the register. Those who benefit from a statement are given the required support of a teacher assistant and through her very good support overcome the barriers to their learning and achieve to their potential. Individual education plans (IEPs) are drawn up for each girl at the school action stage, in consultation with themselves and their parents. The girls' contributions to their IEPs are central to the plan, ensuring that they have a sense of responsibility for meeting the targets set and are clear about the progress they make towards the termly review of the plan. Subject departments are asked to provide a subject specific target for each girl, based on their knowledge of her and the teaching and learning resources they use in the department. All annual and transition reviews of statements are carried out to Code of Practice guidelines. There is no present need for girls to be withdrawn from lessons and the school fully includes them in its curricular and extra-curricular activities. A Connexions personal adviser is available when girls' career prospects are discussed. The adviser also attends transition reviews of statemented girls and draws up a careers action plan for them.
35. Provision for girls' personal, social and health education is effective. The programme of study covers sex and relationships education and gives attention to the misuse of drugs and alcohol. Provision for health education in each of Years 7 to 11 includes a day off timetable for well-organised health conferences. The programme also provides parts of National Curriculum citizenship. In each of Years 7 to 9, girls also have a citizenship day and at least one industrial day. The school acknowledges, however, that form tutors, who teach the PSHE lessons, lack the level of expertise that they show as specialist teachers. This inspection confirms the school's view and the finding of the previous inspection, that coherence and progression within the PSHE programme is insecure. The school has appointed a coordinator who is currently reviewing the content and methods of provision and revising schemes of work.
36. The curriculum is highly inclusive and ensures equality of access and opportunity. The school has facilities for giving access to pupils with physical disabilities in most of its buildings, but not

all. The music block, for example, has no access for wheelchairs. In other respects, however, the principles of equality and fairness are integral to the design of the curriculum.

37. The school is extremely effective in the preparation of girls for the next stage of education or for employment. In Year 9, for example, the girls have specific careers lessons to help them to exercise responsibly the choices they have to make. A teacher coordinates provision and a personal adviser from Connexions is available for personal interviews. In Year 10 girls have good opportunities for work experience. Evidence of success in Year 11 is available from students in the sixth form. Almost all said that they had chosen courses that suited their ability and career plans.
38. The governing body and leadership team have been highly effective in adapting and developing the curriculum. Without any diminution of its commitment to high academic achievement, the school has sought innovative ways of extending its provision. Girls already have a wide range of choice in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Within its traditional academic framework, the school gives the highest priority to the maximum satisfaction of pre-expressed preferences. The newly acquired specialist status goes further and commits the school to the development of a curriculum that is more technological and vocational. The school recognises that it has some pupils for whom an exclusively academic curriculum is inappropriate and plans to offer vocational GCSE courses next year. Through its Beacon School status and work as a specialist school and with its advanced skills teachers, the school reaches out to other schools excellently and involves itself with many aspects of development and innovation in education.
39. The school is highly effective in its provision of a very wide and varied range of extra-curricular activities. At lunchtime and after school a huge number of opportunities are available. The reward of House points for high levels of attendance is an effective incentive. Take-up is particularly good. Two out of three girls in Year 9, for example, undertake the Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award. The range of activities provided covers all aspects of the curriculum and is particularly strong in sports and the arts. The library and the suite of ICT rooms offer good resources for independent learning during and after the end of the school day.
40. Highly qualified and experienced teachers match the needs of the curriculum very well. The recruitment of design and technology teachers has been difficult but even here the school has very largely avoided damage to the curriculum. The contribution of support staff is also very good, particularly in science, information and communication technology, design and technology and art.
41. Accommodation is generally good and allows the curriculum to be taught effectively. Since the last inspection, the school had benefited from many improvements, such as the addition of a library, new sports hall, the conversion of the old gym to a drama studio and the additional development of a suite of rooms for ICT. These provide a stimulating, pleasant environment for learning. There is very good disabled access to most of the buildings, except the music block, enabling girls with disabilities to study most subjects and provision for visitors to use the facilities. The refurbishment of the textiles and food technology rooms has been beneficial in encouraging more girls to study these subjects. Displays are of a very high standard and their use to celebrate girls' achievements is highly effective. Accommodation is tight, however, and three religious education teachers have to manage with just one specialist room. Accommodation for English is particularly unsatisfactory; the old de-mountable classrooms used by the English and psychology departments are drab, get too hot and do not provide an attractive learning environment although they have been improved by the use of some interesting displays. Girls are very tolerant of these limitations and, together with staff, work hard to prevent them affecting their studies.
42. Resources for learning are generally adequate to the needs of the curriculum. The books, materials and equipment available in mathematics, science and art, for example, effectively enhance girls' learning. In most other subjects resources are at least sufficient. In music, however, the lack of up-to-date technology impedes attainment of higher standards. The

library has an adequate stock of books but the provision of facilities for information and communication technology is insufficient for girls' and teachers' needs. Although there are enough computers and provision for the ICT examination courses is very good, access to computers is difficult for some subjects, such as English and geography.

Sixth form

43. The school offers students an academic curriculum with an exceptional degree of choice. Twenty-five different advanced level courses are taught at both AS and A-level. Outstanding results, with very few students dropping out, indicate that the curriculum is highly effective in meeting students' needs. Apart from a small number who follow the key skills course, all students extend and enrich their education by following courses in either general studies or critical thinking. Critical thinking is the first addition to the curriculum to result from the award of specialist status. Both the general studies and the critical thinking courses are not only valuable in themselves but also include consideration of the religious and ethical issues required by the current Agreed Syllabus for religious education.
44. The range and take up of activities beyond the curriculum, in sport and in the arts, are very good. School productions are frequent and include Shakespeare and popular musicals. The many opportunities in music to develop vocal and instrumental talents include the school orchestra and the Westcliff Singers. Opportunities in other areas of activity are excellent. Admission to World Challenge expeditions is competitive and the degree of interest and involvement is exceptional. Two groups of 20 students each raised the funds and then went to Thailand last year where they built a classroom for a school. Other activities include peer counselling, raising money for victims of AIDS in Africa and involvement in events celebrating religious and cultural diversity. Such provision is the result of the school's very good leadership and management combined with the exceptionally positive attitudes shown by students themselves.
45. Accommodation in Hylands House provides a good base for the sixth form, particularly its social areas, quiet study room and careers library. Limited access to the small computer room, due to its use by the main school, is unhelpful for students wishing to use the computers for their own studies. The unattractive English and psychology accommodation does not appear to have a negative effect on the number of students taking A/AS courses in these subjects. However, the science department with its modern science laboratories has a high uptake of students into post-16 science courses.

Care, guidance and support

Girls receive very good support, help and advice through a very effective pastoral system. They are well cared for in a safe and healthy environment. Girls' views are valued and the school responds well to their ideas and suggestions.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- There are good procedures that ensure that everyone works in a safe and healthy environment.
- There are good procedures for child protection led by a very experienced officer.
- Very strong pastoral care ensures all girls receive appropriate help and advice.
- There are very good, highly valued, procedures for the transfer and induction of girls from many different primary schools.
- The School Council effectively voices pupils' and students' opinions and the school has acted upon some of their suggestions for change.

Commentary

46. The school has a good policy and effective practices that ensure the health, safety and welfare of all the girls. Those who become sick and injured during the school day are looked after well and there are clear procedures for helping girls with specific conditions. There are regular checks of equipment and the site to ensure they are safe. Risk assessments are in place and are particularly stringent for school visits, with a dedicated governors' committee overseeing them. The school has effective child protection procedures and the school receives very good assistance from social services and the police if any incidents are reported.
47. The pastoral care of all girls by tutors, heads of year and the school nurse is very effective because staff know them well and ensure their varied personal and academic needs are met. To achieve this the school strongly encourages the use of the very effective peer support system to help those with concerns. This system is highly valued by the girls, who benefit from and appreciate the continuity provided by tutors and heads of year remaining with them as they move up the school. They report that they know someone in school whom they would turn to for help, though it might be another girl. The training by Childline of the pupil volunteers, CHIPS, is working well to provide a listening ear for any who need someone to talk to. This is in addition to the sixth form 'listeners' trained by the Samaritans.
48. There is an effective process for monitoring girls' academic progress through two report reading sessions for each girl every year. They are linked to the issue of reports and are the occasions when targets are reviewed and new ones set. Girls value these discussions as they help them identify how to achieve even better standards.
49. The personal, social, health and citizenship education programme supports the pastoral programme well but its delivery by tutors is being reviewed. Linked with this there is high quality careers advice and guidance provided in collaboration with Connexions.
50. Girls who join the school from many different primary schools are very positive about the effective induction they received both before and after they joined the school. Some travel a considerable distance and do not know any other pupils before they join the school. The amount of help they received from older girls, such as the 'sisters' and 'aunties', was particularly valued and enabled them to settle quickly, gain confidence, enjoy school and do well.
51. The school responds very well to girls' views, mainly put forward by members of the School Council. Some girls do not think the school is interested in their views. However, plenty of examples were seen. The school has introduced changes as a result of suggestions made for the provision of picnic benches and improvements to the toilets. Girls were also involved in the choice of the new headteacher.

Sixth form

52. Students new to the school have a variety of opportunities to acquaint themselves with the school prior to entry, which they appreciate. Some would like more help from subject teachers with the challenges of studying for A-levels. Some students transferring from the main school and from other schools would like better induction arrangements into the sixth form. Students are very well-supported by their tutors and heads of year. Those in Year 12, who moved from the main school, are benefiting from having a year head who has moved with them from Year 11, though this is unusual.
53. The school strongly encourages and assists students to develop further their ability to become effective independent learners in preparation for employment or higher education. Careers advice and guidance are good and there is a comprehensive booklet giving information about university courses and advice on how to select and apply for a suitable course.

54. Students' views are welcomed and responded to; they requested the reintroduction of Houses that they now oversee, for example. They have positive views about the school. They particularly like the friendly atmosphere, helpful staff, the wide range of courses available, the strong community spirit and the encouragement to help others, for example through charity week activities. Although many help others in the school, sixth-formers think there are insufficient extra-curricular activities provided specifically for them. The school is investigating this. A very small number (no more than about 20) do not think the school provides helpful advice about careers, does not give helpful advice on what to study, does not know them well or respond to their views. Inspectors found no evidence to support these views.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Links with parents and carers are good. Links with the community and other schools and colleges are very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are very strongly committed to and supportive of the school.
- Communication with parents and carers is good, except in the provision of curriculum information in Years 7 to 9.
- Girls' reports need to identify more clearly the strengths and weaknesses of individuals in the subjects they study. Plans are in place to change reports.
- Links with the community, especially those forged through specialist school status, are very good.
- Links with other schools and colleges are very good.

Commentary

55. The school strongly promotes a dialogue with parents and regularly asks their opinions on various matters and values the encouragement given by parents to help girls to achieve very high standards. The school responds to parents' and carers' suggestions; it has reviewed the homework arrangements and installed more water fountains, for example, at parents' suggestions. Those who responded to the inspection questionnaire and attended the parents' meeting were overwhelmingly positive about the school.
56. The school provides a good range of information for parents; some, such as newsletters, are also available through its on-line website. Parents and carers receive regular updates on the progress of girls through interim and full reports and parents' meetings. The quality of the comments in full reports is variable and reports frequently do not clearly indicate girls' strengths and weaknesses in the subjects they study. The school is aware of these weaknesses and has plans to change them this year. At present there is very little information provided for girls in Years 7 to 9 about the content of the curriculum they will study. This is a missed opportunity to enable parents to contribute further to their daughters' learning at home.
57. Parents are very keen to support the school and its aims. There is a full complement of parent governors and a very active Parent Teacher Association that provides social events and raises significant amounts of money for the school. This includes contributing funds for the specialist school building project. Parental support for the school's homework policy and for ensuring high attendance makes a significant contribution to the high standards that girls achieve.
58. The procedures for the transfer of girls are good because, despite the very large number of primary schools from which girls come, all girls are visited or contacted prior to entry and invited to an induction day, which they enjoy. Some have the opportunity to visit the school for taster days as well. All girls are set targets to work on before they join the school and these are reviewed when they start.

59. There are very good links with many schools through the school's position as a Beacon School and now as a specialist college. These links enable joint teaching in some primary schools and provide opportunities for other schools to benefit from help given by the school's advanced skills teachers. Links with the community provide a plethora of additional opportunities of mutual benefit to the school and community. The joint ownership and use of the music and dining block with the adjacent boys' high school works satisfactorily.
60. Community links, in particular with the business sector, are very strong and beneficial to the school. A variety of business people come into school to help with the Industry Days for Years 7, 8 and 9. They also provide work experience placements for Year 10 pupils and assist girls involved in Young Enterprise. A number of businesses provided sponsorship for the specialist school; two business people have become governors and three women science and engineering 'ambassadors' are now helping the school.

Sixth form

61. Good information is provided for students and their parents about the school before they join the sixth form and through parents' and students' meetings with staff while they are at the school. The same weakness in the quality of reports exists as in the main school. Parents are well informed about the courses provided in the sixth form and students are helped to make the change to other courses if necessary. During the inspection, many parents attended a meeting on student finances in a citizenship lesson, which provided very useful information. There are good opportunities for students to do work-shadowing and to visit higher educational establishments.
62. Links with the community, such as the business simulation day for Year 12 students with local industry and Young Enterprise projects, provide additional opportunities to stimulate students' enquiring minds, broaden their horizons and challenge them to achieve even higher standards. Joint A-level music and physical education lessons with the boys' high school is of mutual benefit to both sixth forms.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The overall quality of leadership and management is **very good**. The previous headteacher contributed to the very good improvement since the last inspection and the smooth transfer of leadership to the new headteacher has ensured that the school is now poised to succeed in its new role as a Science and Engineering College. The new headteacher provides **very good** leadership and is well supported by his senior staff. The effectiveness of management is **very good**. The governance of the school is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The recently appointed headteacher has a clear vision for the school, which is focused on further raising standards and broadening pupils' experiences.
- Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of the school's work have contributed greatly to its very high standards.
- The very strong linkage between the school's development plan and its financial planning enables the school to ensure that its spending decisions fully benefit its pupils.
- Middle managers are highly effective and have created a strong ethos for sustained development in their subjects.
- The sixth form is very well led and managed.
- The School Improvement Plan lacks the clear structure of objectives and targets present in the specialist school development plan.

Commentary

63. The headteacher has only been in post for a very short time. However, he was able to spend time in the school before taking up his appointment and has a very clear vision for it. This is based on achieving the highest quality of teaching and learning, outstanding examination results and broadening the curriculum, particularly through specialist school status. His high aspirations for the school are shared by his senior staff and the governing body. Senior managers carry out their responsibilities very well and are providing very effective continuity with the past.
64. The school improvement plan is a substantial document covering all areas of the school's work and operations. Although it contains the school mission statement and development contexts, it mainly consists of a list of tasks with key dates for their completion, the key staff responsible and an indication of the financial resources needed. This list shows a good linkage with financial planning. However, there is a need to relate tasks and implementations more explicitly to current practice and future objectives and targets and to establish performance indicators that can be monitored by appropriate staff and governors. The specialist school development plan provides a good model for this.
65. Middle managers are a highly effective group with a strong sense of purpose. Liaison between this group and senior managers is very good. Heads of departments lead by example and regularly review their curriculum and teaching and learning approaches. They have created strong teams. They have drawn up improvement plans that reflect whole school priorities but also developments necessary to sustain and further improve standards in their areas. Statistical data is used in all departments to monitor effectively the progress of individual girls and to facilitate their target setting. Heads of department support teachers in their professional development through a well structured system of performance management and access to good training opportunities, both school based and externally provided. Pastoral managers are highly effective and ensure that pastoral care is very good.
66. The special educational needs co-ordinator has carried through her complex role very well since taking on the responsibility two years ago, with recently added clerical and administrative support. Although the number of girls on the register of special educational needs is well below the national average, the management demands on the school are considerable and the separation of special educational needs from pastoral and disciplinary roles would be advantageous to these girls and those who teach them. The coordinator has developed recording and monitoring systems that effectively track the progress of the girls and ensure that parents, girls and specialist agencies are engaged in provision, as appropriate. She has also led in-service and twilight training for school staff, to keep them informed about new initiatives and to advise them on their special needs role. The involvement of parents and girls in setting up and reviewing targets in IEPs is exemplary, although the structure of the IEPs does not yet bring personal and subject specific targets together to form a strategic individual plan. Not all subject departments have developed their special needs roles to full effect.
67. Governance is good. Governors continue to be very supportive of the school and to monitor its actions effectively. Governors know the school's strengths and weaknesses and some join staff on their training days and spend time in school to keep abreast of progress. Governors have a good input into the strategic development of the school and into formulating the targets in the School Development Plan. They monitor the school's finances very effectively and are closely involved in the building programmes. There are good relationships between governors and the leadership team that enable frank and open discussions to take place.
68. Governors comply with all statutory requirements, except for some minor omissions from the prospectus and governors' annual reports, but these have no immediate impact on pupils. They meet requirements in terms of oversight for health and safety and have in place the required policies and a rolling programme for their review. Constraints on space prevent all pupils and students having a daily act of collective worship together. Those provided do meet

requirements and celebrate the diversity of faiths of its members. The Thoughts for the Week, linked to the assembly programme, and discussed in tutor time, provide an effective alternative opportunity for reflection.

69. Performance Management is now well developed and embedded into the school processes and is clearly linked with the School Improvement Plan. All teaching staff are now used to setting challenging targets, for both their own professional development and for the progress expected of pupils. There is now an established and coherent annual cycle of monitoring and evaluating recent performance, setting pertinent targets, providing support and good quality professional development opportunities linked with the school improvement plan and reviewing the outcomes and their impact on raising standards. The school has a very good review system to help ensure that departments are achieving as required and that the quality of teaching and learning is maintained by an effective and rigorous programme of classroom observations, using agreed observation criteria. Measures to include non-teaching staff in a performance management review scheme is in the early stages of development. The governors carry out their statutory duties well in respect of the head's performance management.
70. The school has good systems for the induction and training of new staff including graduate trainees, newly qualified and supply teachers. The very successful six-week induction course led by senior and middle managers focuses on information and systems related to academic and pastoral issues. For teaching staff in general, there is a well-structured staff development process. Every effort is made to link this to the performance management process and departmental improvement priorities.
71. The school's status as a Beacon School and its specialist school status give it additional funding for staff development. Specialist school funding is related very specifically to the improvement detailed in the development plan. Beacon status has allowed the school to run a training module on leadership and management and a residential course for senior leaders and managers. Staff training days focus on improvement plan priorities, including teaching and learning, the Key Stage 3 Strategy and citizenship.
72. The school has introduced effective new approaches to the recruitment and deployment of staff. There is a good balance between new and more experienced staff and staff deployment has been well managed. The school has put very effective measures in place to implement the government's Workload Agreement. This has freed teachers of the burden of administration.

Sixth form

73. The sixth form is very well led and managed. The head of sixth form is well established and committed to maintaining its deservedly high reputation. She is well supported by the heads of Year 12 and Year 13; together they form a strong team with many complementary strengths and share the common aim of doing the best for all students. Comprehensive and analytical assessment procedures are precisely organised to give a very clear insight into students' progress. The management team has a good knowledge of the effectiveness of teaching, though the monitoring and evaluation are done mostly by subject heads of department. Due emphasis is placed on the achievement of academic excellence and also the development of the whole person, but the induction process does not yet reflect this fully.

Financial information

74. The school's finances are well managed. The leadership team and governors receive clear, up-to-date financial monitoring information from the bursar. Spending decisions made by the governors are clearly related to priorities for improvement and benefits for pupils. The school has responded very positively to national initiatives to appoint staff to undertake a wide range of clerical and administrative tasks previously falling to teachers. These include examination administration, the collecting of money for school trips and activities, classroom displays, the

collation of reports and administering work experience. Teachers are, therefore, able to concentrate more on their core function. Grants for capital expenditure have been well used to contribute towards the building of a new sports hall and the refurbishment of the gymnasium as a much needed drama studio. A contribution of funds is being made to the building extension work that is currently taking place in respect of the science and engineering specialism. This will provide a specialist ICT facility that will be available to all students. The school last received an auditors' report from the Local Education Authority in 2001 and has fully acted on the recommendations made. Due regard is paid to the principles of best value. The school currently anticipates a small surplus on its revenue budget for the current financial year, which represents a prudent contingency.

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	3,353,043
Total expenditure	3,383,336
Expenditure per pupil	3,343

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	376,186
Balance carried forward to the next year	204,248

75. The main aids to girls' achievement are very good teaching and learning in all subjects, high expectations backed up by a rigorous system of statistical analysis and target setting, the girls' own high level of self-motivation and exemplary behaviour, very good leadership and management and the gaining of specialist school status. The main barriers to raising achievement further are the difficulties that subjects and individuals face in getting access to ICT facilities and poor accommodation for English, though the school is searching for solutions to this problem. Taking into account the funding received by the school, the social and economic backgrounds of girls and the very high quality of education provided, the school gives very good value for money.

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

- Very good teaching and learning result in well above average standards.
- Leadership and management of a well qualified team are very good.
- High standards are maintained despite poor accommodation.

Commentary

76. Standards in English are well above average. Attainment in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 is very high and is among the top five per cent in the country. Attainment in GCSE examinations is also very high. Girls achieve very well when account is taken of their attainment on entry. Results have been better in English language than English literature in the last two years, reflecting the recent emphasis placed on developing English language skills. From work seen, pupils' linguistic and literary standards of attainment are equally high.
77. Teaching and learning are very good at both key stages. Lessons are very well planned and structured. There is a very good balance between teacher exposition and pupil tasks. Most lessons begin with a starter activity that focuses girls' attention and leads them into the main learning objectives. Resources are well chosen and very well prepared to stimulate interest and to demonstrate a variety of texts. There is a high expectation of girls to read independently and to be able to present their ideas orally to the rest of the class. Reading and writing skills are very well demonstrated. In a Year 9 class, for example, learning about persuasive writing techniques, the teacher demonstrated how bias is created through the use of emotive language and the manipulation of facts. Pairs of girls were given different extracts from eight newspaper articles on the same political demonstration to compare and annotate. Then all the girls in the class reported back confidently and lucidly, using an overhead projector to illustrate their findings.
78. Marking and assessment are very good. Teachers' marking is very thorough. Girls receive detailed guidance on how to improve and are given targets to aim for.
79. The English curriculum provides wide and challenging opportunities to read, to write and discuss a variety of fiction, non-fiction and media texts. High-attaining girls are extended by units of work on complex narrative, or by being challenged to parody the style of major authors. The few girls who arrive with difficulties with spelling, grammar and punctuation are well supported and soon improve. There are good opportunities for girls to use computers for research and desktop publishing but limited access to the machines restricts the possibilities for extended projects. Accommodation is poor. It depresses staff morale and leads to negative pupil attitudes to the subject. Varying extremes of temperature in de-mountable classrooms and noisy heating systems negatively affect audibility and concentration. Girls and teachers cope very well despite these shortcomings.
80. Curriculum leadership is very good. The head of department monitors girls' progress and the quality of teaching and learning very well and provides very effective leadership of a well-qualified team of teachers. There is a very good development plan based on identified needs and girls' responses to questionnaires. Good professional development, clear guidance through recently reviewed schemes of work and the sharing of new resources and good

practice, all lead to consistently high standards. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. High standards have been maintained.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

81. Girls demonstrate well above average English language and literacy skills in most subjects when they are given the opportunity. They read independently and critically from demanding texts. They can organise their ideas coherently and present them clearly and accurately in writing. They show particular strength in discussion and presenting their ideas orally which they do confidently and precisely. In a few lessons teachers could do more to capitalise on these strengths.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in modern languages is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in GCSE examinations are well above average and pupils achieve well.
- Teaching and learning are good and have resulted in improved attainment.
- Pupils' attitudes are very good and support successful learning.
- Leadership and management are good and have resulted in improved examination results.
- In some lessons there is insufficient use of French and German for the conduct of the lesson, reducing pupils' opportunities to learn to speak the language.
- Girls' written language is better than their speaking skills.

Commentary

82. Results in GCSE French have remained well above average since the last inspection and rose significantly in 2003. Those in German have improved in the last two years and are well above average. This is the result of a strong focus on improving oral work and better preparation for examinations. All girls attained a higher grade and most attained the highest. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 showed girls' attainment to be above average. Attainment is well above average in French throughout Years 7 to 11. In German, which is begun in Year 8, attainment is above average at the end of Year 9 and well above average at the end of Year 11. Girls achieve well in both languages throughout the school.
83. Written work is very good and sometimes excellent. Girls write in French and German at length about a wide range of topics, for example application letters for jobs or narrative descriptions, using a variety of tenses and making few grammatical errors. Understanding of grammar is good and sometimes excellent. Girls have a wide, soundly memorised vocabulary. They develop reading and listening skills, which are well above average and a diverse range of ways to infer meaning. Speaking is noticeably weaker. Whilst girls are able to construct complex sentences, they often make basic mistakes in pronunciation and lack fluency and confidence. This is due to an over-reliance on written support for speaking and insufficient opportunities to practise. Whilst girls cope well with prepared responses, they lack confidence in spontaneous conversation.
84. Teaching and learning are good in French in Years 7 to 11, with some teaching that is satisfactory and a minority that is very good. In German, teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and girls are very well prepared for public examinations, for example by meticulous attention to project work. The teaching of grammar is excellent. Marking is very thorough and helps girls to improve the quality of their work. Well-planned lessons enable them to work productively. A wider range of teaching methods is used than at the time of the last inspection, enabling girls to work well individually and collaboratively. Girls learn quickly and their learning is secure. Good use is made of foreign language assistants to reinforce learning.

However, in a large minority of lessons, English is the dominant language of the classroom. This deprives girls of valuable opportunities to develop their listening and speaking skills in a real context. In the best lessons, the teacher and the girls use German or French for the whole lesson, except for quick checks on understanding. These lessons are challenging and girls attain very high standards. They have very good attitudes to their work and enjoy their lessons, working hard and learning vocabulary thoroughly.

85. Leadership and management are good and have resulted in improved standards and good achievement. The heads of department are supported well by hard working teams. Good progress has been made since the last inspection in most areas, but insufficient use of the target language in some lessons remains an issue.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Girls' behaviour and attitudes to work are excellent.
- Standards are very high because of the teachers' high expectations and the girls' high level of concentration and their determination to succeed.
- Teaching and learning are very good, with an extremely effective interactive learning approach.
- Girls enjoy working independently and they are also very good at working collaboratively in pairs.
- The mathematics department has been led very effectively through a number of successful initiatives over recent years.

Commentary

86. The combination of very good teaching and girls who have high levels of self-motivation and productivity, together with a very good relationship and rapport between teachers and pupils, have contributed to very high standards of achievement. The test and examination results overall are very high and represent very good achievement.
87. The National Curriculum test results for mathematics in Year 9 are very high on a national comparison and the pupils have shown a very impressive improvement on their attainment on entry to the school. In 2002, nearly all girls achieved Level 6 and in 2003, 95 per cent of pupils gained at least Level 7, of whom 40 per cent achieved Level 8. Examination results at GCSE are very high, with nearly all girls achieving grades A* to C in 2003, of whom 60 per cent gained grades A* or A – a significant improvement over the already impressive results of 2002. Work seen in lessons and in exercise books strongly reflects these very high standards, as does the very inspiring coursework. The school's performance in mathematics, although in the top five per cent nationally for some years, has continued to rise steadily and the school sets itself ever higher targets, which it met for each key stage for mathematics in 2003.
88. Very high expectations of girls and their own high levels of concentration and determination to succeed ensure very good achievement in Years 7 to 9. Lessons start from familiar ground, but the very good pace of lessons ensures that the girls move on very quickly to new challenging ideas and knowledge, to which they respond very well. The achievement in lower ability sets is good and in some cases excellent. An example of this was seen in Year 9 where a lower set was working on surface areas and volumes. Using concertina Chinese lanterns, the teacher was quickly able to demonstrate the relationship between the cross-sectional area and the volume. Using very effective question and answer techniques, he extracted all of the necessary prior knowledge from the girls in order for them to find the surface area and volume of a cylinder. In Years 10 and 11, girls' achievement is also very

good. Forty per cent of them work at an accelerated pace and very successfully take the GCSE examination in the Autumn term of Year 11.

89. Teaching and learning are both very good overall in Years 7 to 9. The girls' behaviour and attitudes to work are excellent. The use of interactive learning, where the pupil regularly explains her solution and strategies on the whiteboard, has been a very effective teaching approach requiring a high standard of oral explanation, which enhances learning. Question and answer techniques have been very successfully used to develop and extend ideas and to correct misunderstandings. The often enthusiastic teaching is contagious and promotes even higher levels of learning. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning continue to be very good. Girls consistently work on challenging examples with determination and focused concentration. The girls are very attentive and listen in silence, which considerably aids the learning of difficult concepts. They work very well collaboratively in pairs, giving each other advice on approaches to a solution, but they are equally happy working independently in silence.
90. The head of mathematics has shown very good and effective qualities of leadership and management. He has led the department through a number of successful initiatives in recent years, including the change to AS/A2 level modular specifications, an interactive approach to teaching and learning and elements of the National Key Stage 3 Strategy. The head of department is supported by a strong team of mathematics specialists who have well defined responsibilities, but who work very well together as a team, with very high morale. Through the school's Beacon status, the Advanced Skills Teachers have taken very rewarding and motivating master classes for gifted and talented pupils in Years 5 to 7 from other local schools and they have also been into local primary and secondary schools to share good practice, which has been most appreciated.
91. This department continues to improve in standards of achievement from the high standard of the previous report. It continues to meet the ever more demanding targets that are set from year to year.

Mathematics across the curriculum

92. Girls' high standards in mathematics equip them well for using mathematics in other subjects, although some skills are not readily transferable in science. The mathematics department has produced guidance on common notation, terminology and strategies for other subjects and these are displayed on classroom walls. The branch of mathematics used most by other subjects is statistics, from a basic use in English to support an argument to the use of surveys and the presentation of findings in design and technology. The latter subject also uses percentages, weighing and accurate measurement so that the pupils' skills in mathematics have a positive impact on standards.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and girls respond with very good behaviour and a positive attitude to the subject.
- Girls put commendable effort into their work and learning is very good.
- Standards of attainment are high and girls' achievement at the end of each key stage is very good.
- A variety of teaching approaches including pupil focused learning ensures a high level of interest in lessons.
- Most lessons enable girls to learn very effectively but at times there is a lack of challenge to stretch those of highest ability.

Commentary

93. GCSE double science results in 2003 were very high compared to the national average. Overall results were similar to those of the previous year. The 2003 Year 9 National Curriculum test results were very high when compared with those in all schools and in line with results in similar schools. There was a drop in the numbers achieving the highest level but methods to address this, such as booster lessons and girls' question packs, have been introduced. Average points score results have been consistently high over a number of years.
94. Standards in Year 9 and Year 11 are well above average; achievement is very good in all years. Girls make very good progress in Years 7 to 9. They settle quickly on entry and soon display very good scientific method. This was demonstrated in a Year 7 lesson when girls showed very good investigative and thinking skills in an experiment representing the huddling behaviour of penguins. Another Year 7 group displayed exceptional research skills as they collected material for use in a presentation on a chosen element. Progress in Years 10 and 11 is very good and high pupil ability was seen in all lessons. A Year 10 group quickly grasped important points from a video on plate tectonics and put intellectual effort into a discussion about oceans and mountain range formation. In a Year 11 lesson girls were totally absorbed using a motion sensor and computer projector producing graphs which they related to theoretical data. The small number of girls with special educational needs receive good support, participate fully in lessons and progress as well as others.
95. Teachers' very high subject expertise and skills in presenting information are a positive feature of science lessons. Effective planning and the setting and checking of clear lesson objectives help girls assess their progress. A variety of teaching approaches with an emphasis on practical work ensures a positive response from the girls. Constructive relationships between teachers and pupils lead to a pleasant and productive working atmosphere. Teaching in all years expects the most of the girls, but occasionally opportunities are missed to challenge fully those of the highest ability. Marking of work is regular but inconsistent in giving specific advice on how to improve. A range of extra-curricular clubs further interest in science and events, such as the recent visit by two Russian cosmonauts, widens understanding and introduces girls to the international co-operation existing in the world of science.
96. Science is very well led and managed by a department head with a clear sense of direction for the future of the subject. All staff share a strong commitment to improvement, working well together as a team. Schemes of work are regularly reviewed, resulting in changes to teaching and learning approaches. Literacy skills in science are very high and numeracy skills adequately support all work. Wall displays are impressive and a stimulating learning environment is provided in excellent laboratory accommodation. A hard working team of technicians provides very good support.
97. Since the previous inspection, definite progress has taken place with the introduction of more experimental and investigative science. The application of ICT in science has improved and is still developing. Overall the high level of provision has been maintained.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment at GCSE is well above the national average.
- Teaching is good overall with examples of excellence.
- Teaching methods are exemplary.

- The department operates as a highly effective team.
- The systematic use of ICT to support teaching and learning across subjects is underdeveloped.

Commentary

98. Attainment in ICT by the age of 16 is well above the national average. In Years 10 and 11 all pupils study GCSE. Current standards of work are well above the national average. Attainment by the age of 14 is well above the nationally expected level. Many girls achieve their best grade in ICT.
99. Attainment of current Year 9 girls is well above the national expectation. At this age, they design and create a website suitable for the school following a process of research, planning, designing and evaluation. They develop a presentation on the social, economic, ethical and moral issues raised by ICT and understand the principles of good design. This shows very good achievement from Year 7 to Year 9.
100. Current standards of 16-year-olds are significantly above the national average. Girls create a database designed around the needs of a local organisation. They analyse needs using a data capture form, develop a specification and then create a database application and evaluate its effectiveness. They make advanced searches using the Internet. Project work is detailed and well-documented. There is little variation in the high standards achieved by pupils. One girl with special educational needs was seen to make equivalent progress to others.
101. The department has noted improvements to the ICT capability of girls on entry to Westcliff. The school is effectively introducing the National Strategy materials across Years 7 to 9. These have been adapted to ensure progress to the highest levels of ICT capability. Girls make very good progress in the acquisition of ICT knowledge and skills during these years. The achievement of girls during lessons is good in relation to their capability.
102. Progress from Years 9 to 11 is good as a result of good quality teaching and hard-working pupils. Lessons are designed to offer challenge and pace to pupils. Criteria for awarding marks are emphasised and good quality guidance is provided. Girls undertake research and demonstrate good skills of design, synthesis and evaluation. The excellent results achieved in this subject represent very high achievement.
103. Teaching observed was good overall, with examples of very good teaching, but girls' attitudes ensure that their learning is very good. Teaching methods are exemplary. Teachers make very effective use of data projectors to emphasise lesson objectives, key learning points and summaries. The planning of courses and individual lessons is a notable strength of the department. Teachers have very high expectations of what the girls can achieve and pupils generally rise to the challenge. There is a rigorous approach across the department to promoting the understanding of subject concepts and terminology and examination requirements. Lesson management by all members of staff is highly effective in promoting a good pace and depth of learning. The use of ICT to provide online resources and assignments and to promote research skills is an effective feature of lessons.
104. The management of ICT is very good overall. The department is well run and staff operate as a very effective team. The results achieved by pupils in this subject are amongst the best in the school. The department has responded well to the Key Stage 3 National Strategy in developing the course of study. The development of a substantial online set of support materials for GCSE is a strength of the department, but there is some narrowness in the teaching programme at GCSE and A-level, with an overemphasis on the use of databases. Accommodation for ICT is very good. Rooms are air-conditioned and equipped with data projectors. Two able technicians effectively manage ICT systems.
105. Leadership of ICT is good. Investments made in recent years have resulted in very good facilities for the teaching of ICT and this has contributed to the success of this subject. The

very high levels of capability achieved by 14-year-olds are under-utilised at the present time in their studies across their other subjects. However, the proposed new e-learning centre should remedy this situation. Since the last inspection attainment at Key Stage 3 is now above the national expectation in all areas of ICT and at GCSE remains well above the national average. The use of ICT to support learning in other subjects of the curriculum has improved, but there are still problems of access to computers for some subjects.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

106. The development of ICT in all curriculum areas is satisfactory. Girls' ICT skills develop well and those seen using computers during the inspection demonstrated a high level of competence. Although the school has an average number of computers per pupil for a secondary school, access is limited in several subjects, particularly English, music and geography. This is because of the current difficulty of booking into the computer rooms, which should be eased by the extra provision that will be made by the new cross-curricular ICT room under construction. In mathematics, science, art and religious studies, computers are used frequently and well to enhance the curriculum. There are excellent resources for digital imaging in art and girls use the Internet and presentation software well in religious studies. However, specialist software is limited in geography and science. In design and technology, where computers are available in all areas, there is excellent use of ICT in the research and presentation of projects in computer-aided design and manufacture. As a result of the school's Engineering College status, a robotics and control technology element has been introduced which girls find motivating. It offers challenge to which they respond very well and achievement is good.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision for geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high in Year 9 and at GCSE.
- Teaching methods are very effective in developing independent learning.
- Girl's attitudes to their work are excellent.
- The use of fieldwork enhances learning.
- There are too few opportunities to use ICT in lessons.

Commentary

107. In work seen during the inspection, standards are very high at the end of Year 9 and Year 11. GCSE results have been consistently well above the national average with more than two out of three girls gaining A* or A grades in the 2003 examination. They generally do better in geography than in many of their other subjects.
108. The achievement of all girls in both key stages is very good. Over Years 7 to 9, they develop a good understanding of geographical skills, issues and the location of places. The written work shows great care and effort. Mapping skills are well developed. The local area is used very effectively to allow Year 7 girls to understand the main factors behind the growth of settlements. Year 9 girls discuss the issue of poverty in the developing world and suggest appropriate strategies to help. Year 10 girls have a thorough knowledge and understanding of the processes operating along a depositional coastline. The quality of coursework on rivers completed in Year 10 based on a residential field trip to North Yorkshire is very high. Girls work excellently both independently and in groups and make very good use of their literacy and numeracy skills.

109. The quality of teaching and learning is very good and this is a key factor in raising standards. Teachers have a very good knowledge of the subject, plan lessons very thoroughly and set clear learning objectives. Lessons are brisk ensuring that time is used productively. Very good working relationships between teachers and pupils lead to an atmosphere conducive to learning. Girls' learning is enhanced by their enthusiasm and commitment in lessons. The use of ICT in the department is, however, still underdeveloped because of the limited access to school computers. Homework is used very supportively. Work is regularly marked with clear comments telling girls what they need to do to improve. There is a need, however, to more clearly identify gifted and talented girls in order for them to be extended.
110. Leadership of the department is very good. A new head of department has recently joined the school and has identified through a detailed development plan areas as priorities for improvement. The schemes of work have been rewritten and there is a target to raise achievement further at Key Stage 3. Management of the department is good. Teaching is regularly monitored, both formally and informally. The department is well organised and resources well managed. There is now a need to incorporate new technologies into the schemes of work.
111. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards have improved and the numbers taking the subject at GCSE are at an all-time high. This reflects the quality of the teaching and environment for learning. The issue of the increased use of ICT outlined in the last inspection report remains.

History

Provision for history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Girls' excellent response to the challenging and interesting work enables them to achieve very well.
- Very good learning as a result of very good teaching leads to high standards.
- Girls thoroughly enjoy their work, which is very well planned by their very knowledgeable teachers.
- All girls need the opportunity to have regular access to ICT in lessons so that they can share in the excellent practical work of some lessons.

Commentary

112. Results in GCSE history in 2003 were significantly above national averages. Attainment of girls seen in the present Years 7, 8 and 9 is well above expectation for their age. That of girls in Years 10 and 11 is very high.
113. On entry, most girls work at above expectation for their age. By the time they are 14, they have acquired very good historical skills, well above average. Thus, achievement in Years 7, 8 and 9 is good. GCSE pupils achieve very well; they gain significantly in their historical knowledge, understanding and skills.
114. Teaching and learning are very good. The excellent response of girls results from very good lesson planning. The range of tasks and activities interests them greatly and they are encouraged to think, analyse and evaluate at high levels in order to meet the challenges set. As a result, girls are highly focused and work extremely well and collaboratively in their lessons. An excellent lesson on the Russian revolution led to high quality learning because girls were able to take control of their own learning and make full use of their excellent ICT skills. The very good structure of source work on the Treaty of Versailles developed Year 9 girls' understanding of causation and the problems of bias and prejudice to a high level. Examination techniques are very well taught helping girls to raise their GCSE grades. The

higher ability girls achieve at an appropriate level, because tasks are specifically designed to extend them to their full potential.

115. Assessment and marking are good. Individual girls are very well supported. This has helped to maintain the standards seen in the work of the present GCSE groups. Good assessment tasks are being developed and tested for younger girls. Marking is often very helpful, showing girls how they can do better, but this is not consistent.
116. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Standards in the GCSE examination have been maintained at a high level. Regular monitoring of teaching and learning ensures that the good practice is well shared. Very good quality lesson planning by the very knowledgeable teaching team is a major strength. Clear targets are set to address issues arising from the analysis of examination results. Good use has been made of resources. The team has produced very good citizenship work and history lessons contribute very well to the girls' moral and cultural awareness. A priority that is now being addressed well is to improve girls' use of ICT in lessons.
117. Excellent behaviour and high expectations are key factors in the girls' success. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The high standards and results in national examinations have been well maintained.

Religious studies

Provision in religious education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school now complies with statutory requirements and provides excellent religious education throughout the school.
- All girls in Years 10 and 11 follow a GCSE course and achieve results in the examination that are not only exceptionally high nationally but also the best in the school.
- Teaching, learning, achievement and leadership are all outstanding.
- The head of department is an exemplary role model who has created an excellent teaching team.
- The specialist room is a very good base but too many girls have to be taught in whatever rooms are available elsewhere.

Commentary

118. At the end of Year 9 the girls' standard of work is well above expectation. Knowledge and understanding of Christianity and of the five other religions studied, are excellent. Girls show how, in the foundation of the Khalsa, for example, religion relates to its historical and cultural contexts. They reflect on different aspects of human life. They explore and evaluate religious identity and meaning in relation to themselves and to their own experience and values. Their capacity to express themselves and to communicate to others, using specialist language correctly, is excellent.
119. At the end of Year 11, girls' work is of an exceptionally high standard. Knowledge and understanding of Christianity and Judaism are excellent. Girls' knowledge is very detailed and they use correct specialist vocabulary with precision. They recognise and explain with insight the meanings and motives of religious beliefs and practices. They respond to the moral dimension raised by religious awareness. They evaluate skilfully different religious and moral points of view, including their own. They use reasoning, present evidence and argument in support and then come to a conclusion. Girls who follow the full course show the same excellent knowledge, understanding and evaluative skills in their study of Buddhism.

120. At the time of the last inspection, most girls did not follow an accredited course. Now all pupils follow the GCSE short course and some follow the full course. The results in both courses are exceptionally good. The level of grades awarded is not only well above the national average but also the best in the school. At the end of Year 11 in 2003 only three pupils failed to achieve grades A* to B. Even more significant was the extremely high proportion of pupils achieving the highest grades. Only one pupil in ten achieved less than grade A. Two out of three pupils achieved grade A*.
121. Achievement is now excellent. From the beginning, girls make very rapid progress in acquiring knowledge about the religions studied. They deepen their insight into the meaning of religious belief and practice. They develop the critical skills of evaluation. They learn to speak and write with fluency and assurance. From Year 7, teachers integrate the assessment objectives of GCSE into learning. Girls develop a self-fulfilling inner confidence about their capacity to achieve. In Years 10 and 11, teachers enable girls to add further depth and detail to their knowledge and understanding. Through the repeated use of questions from previous papers, girls become expert at presenting critical reasoning in the expected form.
122. Attitudes are excellent. The excellence of the teaching complements the girls' keenness to learn. The contribution to both intellectual and personal development is outstanding. Girls do far more than just achieve exceptionally high results in the examination. They reflect seriously on life's fundamental questions. They show respect for themselves and for other people's feelings and beliefs, whether religious or non-religious. They are critical but compassionate in their treatment of moral issues. They recognise the responsibilities of good citizenship. They appreciate the richness of religious and cultural diversity.
123. Teaching and learning have improved greatly and are now excellent. Teachers plan lessons with precision so that learning objectives and intended outcomes are clear. Purposeful activities follow in sequence so that girls use the time to the full. Teachers show and share with the girls, their authority and confidence in both content and methods. The use of resources for learning is highly effective. The film *Priest*, for example, successfully challenged girls in Year 11 to think deeply about difficult religious and moral questions. Teachers have the highest expectations of their pupils and give them the means to reach them. They engage their interest so that they listen attentively and work productively. Girls are highly competent in both independent and collaborative learning. Although explicit use of level descriptors is not evident in lessons, assessment is very good. Girls show a ready grasp of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.
124. The curriculum is excellent. The school now meets the statutory requirements of the Local Agreed Syllabus. The match of teachers to the curriculum is excellent. Accommodation is no better than satisfactory. Three teachers have the use of only one specialist room and many girls receive their lessons elsewhere.
125. Leadership is outstanding. The head of department is an exemplary role model who has created an excellent teaching team. Clarity of vision, sense of purpose and high aspirations define the character of the department. Management is good but the department currently has insufficient means of self-evaluation through the analysis of performance data. The use of procedures for measuring and monitoring performance within the department is an area for development.
126. Efforts by the school and within the department to address the issues identified in the previous report have been highly effective. The previous report said that girls in Years 9, 10 and 11 did not receive enough time to meet the requirements of the Agreed Syllabus. Since then, the school has transformed its provision for all girls from Year 7 to Year 13. The introduction of the GCSE short course has moved the school from non-compliance to outstanding success. All girls now receive at least one period a week. In Years 10 and 11 all follow the GCSE short course or the full GCSE course.

127. The school is creative in timetabling and has found a way for those who wish to do so to 'top-up' their short course into a full course. The head of department has become an examiner for the course. He has gained detailed and practical knowledge of how marks are awarded. He knows how candidates can maximise their success. This experience has added greatly to teachers' authority and confidence. Girls enjoy learning how to interpret questions and are confident that they know exactly what the examiner requires. As pupils at a selective school, they already achieve high grades, but success at GCSE has led to a great increase in numbers and to much better results in the sixth form.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

Provision for design and technology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment is well above the national average in Year 9 and very high in Year 11.
- Teaching is very good and results in high levels of achievement.
- The department is very well led and managed.
- GCSE projects are of a particularly high standard.
- Girls make rapid progress as soon as they enter the school, but those with relatively lower ability would benefit from more support for literacy and numeracy.
- Girls show pride in their work and are very keen to do well.
- Accommodation and resources are improving and having a positive impact on learning.

Commentary

128. GCSE results are excellent; they have improved since the last inspection. Girls achieve equally well in all aspects of the subject and their coursework is of a very high standard. Information and communication technology is used particularly well to support girls' learning and the presentation of their work. Practical work is of a very high quality and girls are clearly proud of their work. They put an enormous effort into researching and planning it. They continually evaluate what they are doing in order to improve it. They take advantage of the extra tuition offered by teachers at lunchtimes and after school and conscientiously follow the high quality guidance they are offered. As a result, they are continually improving their work and consequently their exam grades.
129. Attainment on entry to the school is broadly average. Girls' designing and making skills are similar to those of pupils of the same age nationally. As soon as they enter the school they make rapid progress, quickly becoming familiar with the design process and this forms a secure basis for all their future work. They learn to carry out research to ensure they make artefacts suitable for the 'clients'. They acquire a broad range of skills using the full range of materials required in the National Curriculum. They develop competent drawing skills and work carefully with a wide range of materials to ensure a high quality finish. Computers are used regularly for a wide range of purposes. Girls with special educational needs are well supported in lessons, either by the teacher or learning support assistants. They make good use of the extra help available at lunchtimes and after school. As a result they achieve very well for their ability.
130. Girls benefit from well-qualified and very conscientious teachers. Those who are more experienced provide very good support for those who are new to the role. Despite recruitment problems and rooms which are scattered around the building and are currently in the process of being updated, the department works well together and teaching is of a high quality. Teachers plan their lessons thoroughly and they are very well organised. They give freely of their time to ensure girls receive the support they need to do well. Teachers have a very secure understanding of the subject. Consequently, they provide very competent

demonstrations and explanations of new skills and techniques. They have a very good knowledge of the examination requirements. As a result, the guidance they give to GCSE pupils on the completion of their coursework and how to prepare for their final examination is of a very high quality. Consequently, girls know exactly what they need to do to achieve outstanding results. In addition, teachers and pupils enjoy very good working relationships and girls are enthusiastic and keen to do well. In lessons, teachers provide very effective advice to individuals, which helps them improve their work. Higher ability girls are provided with challenging activities which enable them to achieve their full potential. However, teachers do not always sufficiently take account of the needs of the relatively lower ability girls in their classes. They often provide oral support, but rarely provide extra support with literacy or numeracy skills or plan more structured activities. Teachers conscientiously use the department's assessment strategy and this enables the heads of departments to monitor girls' progress both individually and across the different subjects within the design and technology curriculum. At GCSE, the teachers provide very detailed guidance on the strengths and weaknesses of girls' work which clearly leads to improvements. However, in Years 7, 8 and 9, the quality of marking is much more variable. Some teachers mark work very rarely, others mark but provide no evaluative comments, while others spend time correcting work and identifying its strengths and areas that could be improved.

131. The joint leadership of the design and technology department is very effective. There is a very clear vision of where the department is going in the future. Everyone has a part to play in the development of the subject. A clear subject development plan correctly identifies the areas requiring further attention. There is a clear commitment to providing improved accommodation and resources and to developing links with business and the community. The heads of department both provide very effective role models for others to follow and everyone is committed to both self and school improvement.
132. Since the last inspection, there has been very good improvement within the department. Standards have consistently risen and there is no longer any unsatisfactory teaching; it is now very good. The curriculum has been significantly improved. Even though there is still a continuity issue for those girls who would have liked to continue to study resistant materials for GCSE, the rest of the provision has been extended and now covers all the National Curriculum requirements. Accommodation has been significantly improved in food and textiles and these rooms now present a very positive image of the subject. Work continued during the inspection on the building of new workshops. These should have a positive impact on learning when they become available for use in September 2004. In the meantime, all staff, including very conscientious technicians, work very hard to ensure that the de-mountable classrooms are well maintained and provide positive learning environments.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

The provision for art is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent leadership of a very strong teaching team, which promotes and maintains very high standards in the department.
- Very good teaching in all years, leading to very good learning and high achievement.
- The excellent attitudes and exemplary commitment to work shown by girls in lessons, enabling lessons to proceed briskly and productively.
- The provision of high quality computers for digital imaging and manipulation.
- The unsatisfactory provision of storage for the girls' work.

Commentary

133. Standards are very high. Every pupil entered for the GCSE examination in 2003 gained a higher grade A*-C, more than 50 per cent gaining an A* grade. These excellent results are an improvement on the results of the previous year; they are broadly in line with results in other subjects, but significantly above national averages for similar schools. Numbers opting for the GCSE course are rising steadily. The exceptional command that teachers have of the subject and their enthusiasm for teaching it, along with the positive commitment and excellent behaviour of the girls, are key factors in the drive to raise standards.
134. Girls enter the school from a wide range of primary art backgrounds. Their level of attainment on entry is broadly in line with national averages. By the end of Year 9, they have made rapid progress and attain above national standards. The very good teaching of a well-planned curriculum in Key Stage 3 enables the girls to explore their creative talents and to learn the theory and practice of art in an encouraging and challenging learning environment. By the end of Year 11 the standard of work of the more talented girls is in line with the levels expected of AS examination candidates.
135. The quality of teaching is very good and on occasion it is excellent. Teachers have an excellent command of their subject and teach confidently and enthusiastically, motivating girls to achieve very well in lessons. A contributing factor in the high standards lies in the teachers' encouragement of girls towards independent learning. Teachers share both high expectations and a belief that girls can be motivated to work to the best of their ability in a well-informed and supportive climate. Girls respond with exemplary behaviour and commitment to their work.
136. The head of department gives exemplary leadership to her high quality team and is an excellent role model for them and for the girls. Under her leadership, the department has made a very good improvement since the previous inspection. The team benefits from the able support of an experienced art technician. The excellent displays of work around the school, often exhibited in the community, are evidence of the high regard in which the school holds the subject.
137. Although the excellent computers have only recently arrived in the department, all teachers have been trained to use the digital software and girls are learning to navigate the complex programme and explore the exciting, innovative field of computer art. Storage capacity for girls' drawings and paintings is unsatisfactory.

Drama

Provision in drama is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and learning lead to well above average standards.
- The subject makes a very good contribution to girls' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through extra-curricular opportunities.
- Opportunities are missed to build on the very good introduction in Year 7.

Commentary

138. Standards are above average in Year 7 and well above average in Years 10 and 11. Attainment in GCSE examinations is well above average. Girls' achievement is good in Year 7 but there are missed opportunities to build on an effective foundation because no lessons are offered in Years 8 and 9. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 by the GCSE candidates is very good.
139. Teaching and learning are very good. Girls are introduced to a range of drama skills and techniques in Year 7. They respond well. Their movement is disciplined, controlled and

expressive. However, because they receive only one lesson per fortnight in Year 7 and none in Years 8 and 9, there is little room for consolidation and extension. In Years 10 and 11 the teaching is both challenging and sensitive and girls explore and put into practice some very demanding theory. In Year 10, for example, girls tested Stanislavsky's theory of emotional memory, interpreting a piece of script by drawing on their own emotional experiences and stimuli. Their performances were inventive; they were willing to experiment; their evaluations were very thoughtful and healthily critical. Assessment is very good. Girls' self-evaluation is integral to the drama courses.

140. The subject is very well led and managed. There is a good improvement plan. The subject leader has identified the need to improve girls' written work to the same high standard as their physical performance. Girls are given very good opportunities to visit the theatre, to work with theatre groups and to participate in school productions. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Girls now benefit from a spacious, well equipped drama studio and the subject is now taught in Year 7.

Music

Provision in music is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at GCSE are outstanding.
- Teaching, learning and achievement are very good in the examination classes.
- The number of girls having instrumental tuition is above the national average.
- Practical skills need further development in Years 7-9 to be more in line with the intentions of the National Curriculum and to raise standards for all.
- Limited resources for music technology restrict development of skills in composing.

Commentary

141. Standards at the end of Year 9 are in line with national levels overall though not as high as teacher assessments. A significant number of pupils receiving instrumental tuition achieve above the expected level. Girls in Year 7 have musical skills broadly in line with national levels when they enter the school but there is a disparity of musical experience. In Years 7 to 9, they develop good listening skills, understand music notation and describe the musical elements using terminology correctly. However, they are not given enough opportunities to develop practical skills in performing. Some good performances were heard during the inspection by girls who have instrumental tuition, whilst others had difficulty maintaining a solo melody line accurately and fluently. They have only very limited opportunities to use music technology and this adversely affects the development of composing skills. When composing, girls often work on manuscript paper, but have too few opportunities to hear and develop their ideas. This theoretical approach produces lower standards because girls cannot develop their compositions in a practical, musical way. Achievement and progress are satisfactory overall.
142. Recent results in GCSE examinations have been outstanding. All girls have achieved A*- C grades, with a significant proportion achieving the highest grade last year. Group numbers were in line with the national average although numbers opting for music are currently decreasing. Standards in performance are very high and some outstanding playing was heard on a variety of instruments. Standards of composing are more variable. In the best work, girls show very good understanding of their chosen styles and they develop their ideas well within clear structures. A few compositions have less clear harmonic progressions and structures and scanning is not always appropriate. Girls use music technology to sequence their compositions, but the computers are not linked to music keyboards so girls can only work in step-time which slows progress. Listening skills are well developed and girls' understanding is very good. Achievement and progress are very good for these well-motivated pupils.

143. Teaching and learning are always at least sound; some good and very good lessons were observed. The best teaching is in the examination classes. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and explanations of tasks are clear and well-supported by appropriate musical examples. Varied tasks on the chosen topic sustain girls' interest and enable them to develop a broad understanding of the subject. Questioning is well used to consolidate and extend knowledge; girls are very responsive and express themselves confidently. Their attitudes to learning are very positive and relationships are good. In Years 7 to 9, girls sometimes spend too long on the same task and composing is not always taught in a practical context. The theoretical approach is not always appropriate to the musical style or the intentions of the National Curriculum and a greater emphasis on practical activities is needed in several cases. When girls do use instruments to develop group compositions, teachers need to make full use of the available practice rooms to ensure their pupils can hear their work clearly and make good progress.
144. Several areas of the music department are well managed. High achievement has been sustained in the examination classes and in the extra-curricular activities. A woodwind group led by a pupil gave an excellent performance in assembly. The department joins with the boys' school for the orchestra and main choir, and there are many opportunities for pupils to perform in concerts and events in school and in the community. A school show is produced; the Show Choir heard rehearsing songs from Les Miserables was very well attended. Styles of music performed by these groups are mostly classical at present and a wider range, including a jazz band and rock bands, are planned. The number of girls receiving instrumental tuition is above the national average.
145. The last two inspections have criticised the lack of practical opportunities in lessons to develop skills in composing and performing. More opportunities have been developed in the current curriculum plan but there are still areas where the approach remains too theoretical. Too often girls in Years 8 and 9 compose using manuscript paper rather than playing, hearing and adjusting their ideas. They also need more time to develop performing skills.
146. Limited reference to world music was also criticised in the previous report. Some more world music has been introduced in the Year 9 plan but most topics in Years 7 and 8 still focus on music of the western classical tradition. Curriculum time for Year 9 has improved since the last inspection. Teachers know their pupils well and they in turn are aware of how to improve their work. There are some more recordings of pupils' work than there were at the previous inspection.
147. The department shares some accommodation with the boys' school. Sharing a classroom presents some difficulties in organising the room and equipment. The main music room needs some reorganisation to avoid the safety issues caused by the trailing wires from the wall plugs. More use could be made of the practice rooms in class lessons to enable girls working in groups to hear their work clearly.
148. There are insufficient resources for girls in Years 7 to 9 to develop skills in music technology which adversely affects standards and progress in composing. Lack of music technology was criticised in the last inspection report. Resources for reference and CDs are good but most keyboards are very old - most with mini-keys - and these need to be brought up to date.
149. Improvement is satisfactory overall. Some improvements have been put in place but there is scope for further development. With more lesson time spent on a practical approach to learning, with music technology in place and with a wider range of musical styles in the extra-curriculum, the department would be well poised to redress the falling numbers in the option groups and to encourage ever more involvement in the subject.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent attitudes and response towards their work enable pupils to achieve very well.
- Girls learn very well because teachers use their very good subject knowledge to plan exciting and challenging lessons.
- Very good extra-curricular activities give all girls opportunities to extend their skills in their favourite activities and to perform at a higher competitive level if they are talented.
- Girls have very good knowledge and understanding of performance and analyse it very well.

Commentary

150. In 2003, teacher assessment showed that the attainments of girls at the end of Year 9 were above average. All those taking GCSE full and short courses in 2003 gained A*-C grades. In GCSE dance, all candidates gained A*-C grades. The results in all three examinations were high compared to national averages.
151. Most girls enter the school with skills above expectation for their age in major sports. Nearly all in the present Year 9 perform well above expectation for their age. Their achievement is good and their analysis of performance is generally excellent. The all-round improvement in standards in practical and theory work in Years 10 and 11 GCSE physical education and dance classes shows pupils' achievement is generally very good.
152. Teaching and learning are very good; lessons are very well planned. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and of the capability of their pupils, who learn very well. Teachers were observed taking their lessons at pace and setting clear targets. In Year 10 and 11 dance lessons, very good pace and challenge created a vibrant learning experience for all participants. In developing a sequence where they mirrored a partner's work, Year 10 girls showed exceptional movement skills, accuracy and timing. In GCSE theory work, opportunities to research and work independently encourage excellent responses from pupils. This was seen in the scrutiny of girls' folders and their personal exercise programmes.
153. Good procedures for assessing girls' attainment have been established. The girls say that the impact on their achievement is good; knowing about their work makes them try hard to do better. However, the good use made of target setting seen in some sessions is not developed for all pupils.
154. Leadership and management are good. Strong teamwork underpins the success of the department. By providing a well-planned wide range of activities for all girls, nearly everyone has the opportunity to develop her skills in an area that she enjoys. The department makes a very strong contribution to the school through inter-house competitions and inter-school ones too. The team has very strong involvement in district sports and is highly committed to extra-curricular activities. The high take-up of activities by girls and their enthusiasm for their work are significant features of the department's success.
155. Girls are very positive towards physical education. They behave impeccably, form excellent relationships with their teachers and are outstanding in the support they give one another. The extra-curricular activities, the competitions based around the house system and the extremely good relationships have a major impact upon pupils' personal, social and moral development. The concepts of sportsmanship, team spirit, friendly competitiveness and supportiveness of others are to the fore. Good improvement has been made since the last inspection.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A coordinator for citizenship has been newly appointed and schemes of work are rapidly being developed.
- All departments have carried out an audit to measure the extent to which they contribute to citizenship.
- Specific citizenship teaching is included in the curriculum.
- Citizenship days are organised for girls in Years 7 to 11.
- Activities such as the school council and focused assemblies successfully involve girls in the wider practical aspects of citizenship.
- Citizenship needs further development in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

156. Girls reach good standards by Year 9 and Year 11 and are achieving well. The new coordinator has substantially rewritten the schemes of work. Planning for the subject is very good. A full audit of where other subjects cover the topics and objectives of citizenship has been completed. Whilst this revealed contributions over a range of subjects it was decided that four departments - English, religious education, geography and history - would contribute directly. They now include one topic per year group in Years 7, 8 and 9 that is explicitly citizenship and can be assessed as such to meet the National Curriculum requirement. None of these could be observed during the inspection. The results of assessments are included in each girl's progress folder. Citizenship modules are included in the PSHE programme for all year groups. In Years 7, 8 and 9 these currently cover community, which introduces the theme of elections, living in Britain, ways of learning, crime and human rights.
157. Teaching and learning are good. In a Year 9 lesson, girls considered consumer rights in respect of faulty goods and services. They demonstrated good analytical and discussion skills and showed considerable enthusiasm for the topic. Girls' knowledge and understanding were enhanced by the teacher's good use of prompts and open-ended questions. In a Year 7 lesson, girls considered the problems associated with refugees and asylum seekers. The lesson involved the girls in their own learning through structured activities and discussion and helped them develop their social, spiritual and cultural awareness. They learned well because the teacher provided a good framework and focus. A short tutorial session is also utilised each week to deliver citizenship topics. Lesson plans for these are well set out for tutors and include objectives, resources, activities and learning outcomes.
158. Provision in Years 10 and 11 is uneven, but this is being addressed by the coordinator. Modules are again included in PHSE. Many citizenship topics are also covered in the religious studies full or short course which all girls take. In a very good PSHE lesson in Year 11, for example, girls were asked to understand the process and implications of taking out a loan. They worked co-operatively in groups discussing the renting of properties and the costs involved, using evidence from local newspapers. They achieved well and demonstrated high levels of analysis and evaluation skills.
159. A crime day is organised for Year 8 girls where they enhance their awareness and understanding through such activities as talks by the police, drama, and mock trials. Year 7 girls spend a day at Danbury youth camp undertaking bonding and team building exercises. Year 9 girls consider human rights on their citizenship day and are involved in dance, drama, creating a newspaper, writing songs, filming interviews on the streets and artwork. In addition to timetabled lessons girls have many opportunities for practical and subject-based extra-curricular and community initiatives. The school council and its election process provide a forum for all girls to experience the democratic process.

160. The leadership and management of citizenship are very good. The new coordinator has worked hard to reorganise the delivery of the subject in an imaginative and comprehensive way and to give it a high profile in the school. Training days have been used for staff in-service training. Citizenship is well embedded in the Key Stage 3 curriculum but further development is needed at Key Stage 4. There are sound assessment procedures in Key Stage 3, which relate to the modules delivered by English, geography, history and religious education.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, twelve 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.

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
Art and design	9	100	90	100	42.7	58.9	39
Business studies	6	100	89.1	33.3	31.7	41.7	35.4
Chemistry	5	100	84.8	40	36.9	40	35.2
French	6	100	85.4	33.3	35.2	36.7	34.9
Design and technology	5	100	89.2	80	32	48	35.7
General studies	65	98.5	78.6	50.8	25.7	42.2	30
Information and communication technology	5	100	78.2	100	20.6	56	28.5
Mathematics	24	95.8	74.2	37.5	34.3	37.9	31.3
Other social studies	19	89.5	83.2	36.8	32.5	39.5	33.6

Level 3 GCE A- level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	19	100	96.1	94.7	48.7	115.8	85.1
Biology	31	100	91.6	71	36.3	104.5	74.1
Business studies	21	100	96.4	38.1	32.8	84.8	76.5
Chemistry	34	100	94	82.4	45.9	102.4	81.1
Drama	14	100	98.1	64.3	41.5	92.9	82.9
Economics	5	100	96.2	100	45.8	116	83.1
English/ English Language	7	100	98.3	57.1	36.5	91.4	80.1
English Literature	27	100	98.5	92.6	43.7	108.9	84.3
French	16	100	96.2	50	46.1	91.3	83
Design and technology	17	100	95.3	76.5	35.5	104.7	76.5
General studies	24	100	90.1	50	29.1	86.7	69.3
Geography	8	100	97.1	75	40.5	110	80.9
History	32	100	97.1	75	41	103.1	81.2
Information and communication technology	26	100	89.1	73.1	22.4	102.3	64.1
Mathematics	48	100	93.3	91.7	52.2	112.5	84.7
Other social studies	40	100	94.3	65	38.9	96	77.7
Physics	33	100	92.8	81.8	42.8	107.9	78.6

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths

- Very good teaching and learning result in well above average standards.
- Assessment and student guidance are very good.

Commentary

161. Standards are very good. Attainment in AS and A-level examinations in both English literature and English language are very high. Achievement in Year 12 and Year 13 is very good.
162. Teaching and learning are very good. Students are very well prepared for both their coursework modules and their final examinations. They are provided with very helpful guidance booklets, reading lists and diaries of key dates so that they can plan their revision and meet coursework deadlines. Teachers frequently reinforce the examination assessment objectives and explain how particular lessons and units of work relate to these objectives. They encourage students to read independently and demonstrate a range of strategies for critically reading and evaluating a range of previously unseen literary and non-literary texts.

Students are constantly encouraged to widen their vocabulary and to use language precisely both in speaking and in writing. They question students skilfully, individually and as a group, drawing out their understanding and encouraging them to develop a thesis. Teachers and students share a common respect that leads to free discussion and students feel confident enough to challenge and argue an opposing point of view. The marking and assessment of students' work are very thorough, detailed and helpful.

163. Curriculum leadership is very good. The department has widened the choice of examinations in response to students' demands so that students can specialise in English literature or language and literature. To enable this, resources have been improved, schemes of work have been developed and teachers have been encouraged to avail themselves of in-service training and professional development to extend their knowledge. This has resulted not just in increased numbers choosing the subject at sixth form level, but also to improvements at earlier key stages. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. High standards have been maintained and the choice of courses widened.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

164. Students' English language and literacy skills are well above average. They write fluently and accurately, organising their ideas coherently. They read independently following their own lines of enquiry and making their own notes. Speaking and discussion skills are particularly well developed. Students use the appropriate vocabulary of the subjects they are studying and are able to argue a point of view clearly, or present an extended explanation.

Modern foreign languages

French was inspected in full and German sampled in one lesson in each of Years 12 and 13. Written work was scrutinised. Standards attained are well above average and teaching and learning are good. Students' attitudes to learning are very good.

French

Provision in French is **good**.

Main strengths

- Results in public examinations are well above average and students achieve well.
- Teaching and learning are good and some aspects of teaching are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good and have resulted in improved examination results.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very good and contribute to their success in learning effectively.

Commentary

165. Results in advanced level examinations in 2003 were well above the national average and above those achieved in previous years. Students achieved in line with their prior attainment. AS results were also well above average, with all students attaining an A - D grade.
166. On entry to sixth form, standards in French are well above average and maintained throughout Years 12 and 13. Students engage fluently in written and spoken discussion about topical issues in France, such as the ban on wearing religious clothing in French schools and domestic violence, presenting and justifying their views with reference to evidence. They have a wide vocabulary and express complex ideas clearly. However, pronunciation and intonation in speaking are uneven. Students make few grammatical errors in written translation into French and summarise accurately and well. They read and listen to a wide range of spoken and written texts on topics such as the Islamic faith, pollution, the environment and, unusually,

poetry, with very good understanding. Research, particularly on the Internet, is well planned and informs students' work. Students have very good attitudes to their learning and take a mature and responsible attitude to their work, preparing well and learning thoroughly. They achieve well and are maintaining their high standards.

167. Teaching and learning are good, with some very good features. Teachers have high – and sometimes very high – expectations of students' work and standards. Very good knowledge of examination requirements results in students being very well prepared for examinations. A good range of teaching methods is used and well-chosen resources, such as videos on a controversial news item, are used to stimulate discussion and debate. In the best lessons, students are constantly supported and challenged to extend and develop their ideas and opinions through skilful and persistent questioning. There is a very fast pace and challenging tasks are set. Students always relish the opportunity to tackle the difficulties. Marking of work is always very thorough and gives good guidance on how to improve work.
168. Leadership and management are good, focused on raising standards and students have good support outside lessons. There were no suggested improvements at the time of the last inspection. Since then, results in A and AS level examinations have risen and students are better prepared for examinations, so progress has been good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths

- The department is fully staffed by highly qualified and experienced teachers of mathematics, with a very good command of the subject.
- Standards are very high; students gain a high proportion of A or B grades.
- Mathematics is a very popular subject at A-level and has a high retention rate.
- Students are very good at working independently and have a very high level of self-motivation and productivity.
- There is a very good relationship between staff and students.

Commentary

169. Very good examination successes are a result of a blend of very good teaching approaches that motivate and students who are eager to learn and succeed. The examination results overall are very high and represent very good achievement. The results for AS examinations in 2002 were well above the national average and for A-level they were very high. In 2003, 70 per cent of students achieved A-level grades A or B, although there was a slight drop in points scores compared to 2002, due to a very strong group of students that year. The trend over time shows a steady improvement in standards.
170. The standard of work seen during the inspection reflects this very good achievement. Unfortunately this inspection coincided with some of the AS/A2 module examinations, so that one-third of the lessons seen were for revision. The large files of notes and worked examples were organised well for revision purposes and were a very useful resource. They showed a very good standard of worked examples.
171. In Years 12 and 13, students' achievement overall is very good. The accelerated group that started the Pure 1 module in January of Year 11 are working at a very high standard in Year 12. They made very good progress during one lesson, from having little knowledge of differentiating equations to being able to find the equation of tangents and normals of logarithmic curves. The standard AS group also showed very good achievement in their work, finding division of polynomials quite challenging in the time available.

172. Teaching and learning are both very good in the sixth form. The teachers have a very good command of the subject matter, enabling the use of alternative strategies and explanations when needed. There is a very good, relaxed, relationship and rapport between teacher and students, which motivates the girls to respond to questions, and even if the answer is incorrect, allowing others to improve upon it. Students were questioning when they did not understand and others often provided the explanation. At times, they decided whether to work collaboratively as a pair and discuss strategies for a solution or to work independently. Usually they preferred the latter.
173. There were some excellent and stimulating lessons. In one revision lesson, students were given the opportunity to discuss, but they all decided to work through the questions individually in silence, with very good application and concentration, only discussing when finished. The teacher was enthusiastic, which made the revision exciting and fun and considerably helped the learning of past work. This was a very effective use of time and many past questions were covered.
174. The department is very well led and managed. One of its strengths is the very good command of the subject by the teachers and this is very well utilised by all eight full-time teachers being involved in the teaching of the ten different Year 12 and 13 classes, including two classes of Further Mathematics. Good coverage is provided by sharing classes between teachers and this also gives students a good opportunity of working with different teachers. Since the last inspection, results have risen broadly in line with national figures but at a higher rate generally.

Mathematics across the curriculum

175. Results in GCSE mathematics are very high, enabling students to have the skills to support learning involving mathematical concepts in other subjects. Students are competent in using statistical models to analyse and represent data as required in business studies, economics, geography and biology and they find applying their knowledge of mechanics very supportive in physics.

SCIENCE

Chemistry and biology were inspected in full. Physics was sampled in two lessons, both in Year 12. Teaching and learning were very good. Students were motivated by interesting starter exercises in both lessons: the topics related to measuring the resistance of metals and measuring pressure. They went on to achieve well in these topics because of their teachers' very good expertise and planning, based on previous assessment. Standards were high in both lessons.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The high standards and very good achievement of the students.
- The excellent knowledge of the teachers is effectively used to produce very good and enjoyable learning.
- The enthusiasm of both teachers and learners.
- Inconsistent correcting of work.
- The skilful use of questions to enable students to develop topics for themselves.

Commentary

176. The standards in the AS level examination in 2002 were well above the national average and the school maintained its standards in the 2003 examination. The present Year 12 are also working at this level. This was exemplified by a group learning about isomers, who were quick

to relate structural arrangements to nomenclature and their depiction as skeletal formulae. The students achieve very well from a firm GCSE base. All who set out on the course last year completed it.

177. The standards at A-level were well above the national average in 2002; although there was a slight drop in 2003 they remained very good. The present Year 13 is working at a very good standard and achieving very well from the already strong position in the AS level. In an impressive lesson, students developed the skills needed to generate ionic equations and even to appreciate how a pH meter works. Almost all students who began the course last year completed it. Chemistry is a popular subject; the numbers opting for sixth from chemistry are substantial and rising.
178. The quality of teaching is very good and consequently the students learn very well. In all lessons observed teaching was either good or very good. The strongest features of the teaching are that it is very well planned, enthusiastically delivered and interesting. The students are well stimulated to think and keen to volunteer answers to questions; they work hard and really enjoy their lessons. The teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to good effect enabling the students to develop topics for themselves. Relationships are very good and teachers are always ready to advise and to help in their own time. Whilst marking is often very good and helpful, it is not consistent; some work is overlooked and would benefit from attention.
179. The subject is very well led and managed with a very good team of staff. The curriculum and assessment are effectively organised, the laboratories are good and the very good resources are well deployed and maintained - all of which contributes well to the high standards expected and obtained by this very successful department. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

BIOLOGY

Provision for biology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The high standards and very good achievement of the students.
- The excellent teacher knowledge is well used to produce an interesting and stimulating course.
- The very good correction and assessment of the students' work, enabling them to improve and gauge their standards.
- In some lessons a tendency to tell rather than to stimulate thought.

Commentary

180. In the 2002 AS level examination the standards were well above the national average and the school produced similar standards in 2003. Standards remain high, but they are lower than last year due to some good, but less able, students. Nevertheless a group investigating mitosis and meiosis were mostly well able to explain how meiosis generates huge variation in the gametes. For all three years the achievement has been very good in the progress made from GCSE. Almost all who embarked on the course last year completed it.
181. At A-level in 2002 standards were very high, when compared to national averages. In the 2003 examination there was a slight decline, but the students' performance remained very good. The present Year 13 are working well and producing a very good standard, well demonstrated by some who were able to discuss why and how the main nitrogenous excretory product varied between different groups of animals. The students achieve very well, building upon their already strong GCSE results. Almost all who set out on the A2 course complete it.

Biology is a deservedly very popular sixth form course and the already high numbers of students taking the course are increasing.

182. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers use their excellent subject knowledge well to produce an interesting and stimulating course. Lessons are effectively planned with clear objectives, which are attained. Good use is made of computer technology in the teaching, both during lessons and by encouraging students to research the Internet and the good departmental intranet. In some lessons there is a tendency for teachers to tell rather than to stimulate thought. Much of the correcting is outstandingly good, leaving students in no doubt as to how they are doing and how to improve. The assimilation of new learning is thoroughly checked. Teachers are always ready and willing to help and to advise in their own time. All this leads to very good learning; students are keen and respond well to questions.
183. At the time of the inspection the subject was being temporarily led by an effective acting head of subject. The very good use of assessment and the well organised curriculum, with its field course at Flatford Mill, contribute to the high standards and reflect a very well led and managed department. The good laboratories and the very good, well-deployed and utilised resources allow students to achieve very well. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment in AS and A2 level ICT is well above the national average.
- Examination results are amongst the best in the school.
- Current standards are well above the national average.
- The teaching of ICT at this level is very good.
- Students' achievement is very good.

Commentary

184. Attainment is well above the national average at AS level and A-level. Examination results are amongst the best in the school. Current standards are well above the national average. Students undertake a project involving creating database applications for a company. They cover each stage of the project in depth from design to implementation, from testing to evaluation. All stages of the project are extensively documented, making particularly good use of graphical descriptions like flow diagrams and entity relationship diagrams. Theory work underpins project work. Students use good design principles in the design of a software interface. They explain in some detail the advantages and disadvantages of selling products on the Internet. Students' files are detailed and well organised for revision purposes. They show frequent testing and the study of examination questions.
185. Students start their AS course with at least a B grade in the full course in this subject at GCSE and make very good progress through AS and A-level. The progress made during lessons is good. The above average results achieved indicate that students' achievement is very good by the end of the course. Teachers make very good use of resources and time and students learn well, with an understanding of how to achieve high marks for their project and written examination.
186. The teaching of ICT at this level is very good overall with examples of very good and excellent teaching. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and make use of effective methods of teaching, including the use of data projectors. They have very high expectations for what students should achieve. Good relationships are evident and effective in promoting progress. Students have developed good skills of independent learning and apply knowledge in the

design of database applications. The emphasis on teaching model answers to exam questions and understanding grade criteria has led to a good understanding of how to achieve the higher grades. A detailed approach to teaching the knowledge and theoretical aspects of the subject underpins the skills associated with designing and implementing systems.

187. Leadership and management of the subject at this level are very good. The very high results achieved are a consequence of a well-organised subject, very good planning, excellent resources and effective systems. The assessment of progress made in the subject is effective in both formal marking and day-to-day questioning and guidance.
188. During the last inspection it was noted that students in the sixth form make good progress in relation to their prior experience of ICT and this is still the case.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

189. Sixth-formers have very good ICT skills and there is good evidence of the use of ICT in research projects and presentation. In the subjects in the main school where ICT is strong, it is also strong in the sixth form, but the same problems occur with access to computers. Although the sixth formers have their own computer room, access to this is made more difficult by classes from lower down the school being timetabled there.

HUMANITIES

History, geography and religious studies were inspected in full. Psychology was sampled in two lessons – one in Year 12 and another in Year 13. Teaching was good though it can be a little too didactic. Teachers have very good subject expertise and students are very well motivated to learn by the interesting way in which psychological research methods and topics, such as schizophrenia, are developed through real-life examples.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and students achieve very well.
- Teachers have good subject knowledge and experience.
- Students display excellent attitudes and clearly enjoy the subject.
- Students develop very good research skills.
- The use of ICT in lessons to reinforce learning is underdeveloped.

Commentary

190. The 2002 A-level results were well above average, maintaining a consistent pattern over several years. In 2003 the results improved further when more than four out of five students achieved the top two grades. Standards of work seen both in Year 12 and 13 during the inspection significantly exceed national standards. Students generally achieve as well in geography as in their other subjects.
191. The achievement of students is very good in the sixth form. They show very good knowledge and understanding of physical and human geography. They collect information from a variety of sources and form sound judgements from the data. In a Year 13 lesson, two students delivered a presentation on the development of a salt marsh and whether it was worth protecting. The students made very effective use of new technologies including the Internet in their preparation. In Year 12 students built on previous knowledge when studying the various stages needed for a country to develop. Students recall knowledge very well, can analyse and interpret data and are able to discuss geographical concepts using appropriate key words.

Students have very detailed and well presented files, which contain evidence of their own research. There is, however, very limited opportunity for students to get access to the computers in lesson time and this remains underdeveloped.

192. Teaching and learning are very good. Constant features in the teaching were very good planning, setting clear learning objectives, a brisk pace and an appropriate range of methods and approaches, although occasionally there was an over-dependence on the text book. Teachers use questions skilfully in challenging students to think about issues. They respond very well. Students' excellent attitudes are a significant factor in the very good learning and achievement. They work well in small groups, support each other and are very confident when feeding back.
193. The leadership of geography is very good, with a very clear vision for the development of the subject. Documentation is very thorough and teaching is effectively monitored. Assessment of students' work is securely based on examination criteria. Fieldwork opportunities are excellent and are a very important factor in enhancing understanding of, for example, sand dune succession in Bridlington and urban developments in Malton. There is a need to make more use of new technologies to enhance teaching and learning as they become available in the school.
194. Results have improved since the last inspection. Students enjoy their work which is a tribute to the quality of the teaching they receive.

History

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent results at A/S and A-level
- Subject knowledge and examination expertise of staff.
- Monitoring of student performance and the support given to students to ensure high standards.
- Student note-taking and the organisation of their folders is not checked.
- Better use of ICT is required to improve learning.

Commentary

195. Standards in history are very high. Results in 2002 were outstanding and these very high standards were maintained in results in 2003 when half of the students gained grade A at A-level and almost three-quarters of the students achieved a grade A in the AS level. Standards observed in the inspection in Year 13 were well above average, although students were beginning a new topic and were not yet secure in their knowledge and learning. In Year 12 standards are above average.
196. The achievement of sixth formers is very good. Students enter with above average standards and leave with very high standards. They benefit from the quality of teaching and the level of extra support they receive from their teachers and from the fact that they are very talented, highly motivated and very hard working.
197. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers are well qualified and experienced in teaching A-level. They divide responsibilities for the different papers and pay close attention to the requirements of the Examination Board in preparing students. A variety of teaching methods is employed. Pupils in a Year 12 class were analysing and debating, in some depth, differing attitudes to women's suffrage at the end of the 19th century. They were thinking critically and appreciated differing points of view from contemporary sources. In Year 13 students had prepared well for their class with prior reading on the 1832 Reform Act. They showed good

understanding of political concepts which enabled them to appreciate the pressures for political change.

198. Teachers set and mark work regularly. Some of the marking is exemplary - detailed, informative, illuminating and encouraging, setting a very high standard. Files and notes are not checked, however and this is a weakness. Increasing use is being made of ICT for research and the completion of coursework but it has yet to impact as a teaching tool. The students interviewed showed very good understanding of historical concepts. They were confident and assured in their responses. They agree that they are well supported in their studies and are comfortable about asking for help from their teachers when they need it. That they are happy with the course is evident in the numbers of students opting to study history at university. Also impressive are the wide range of interests shown by the students in their choice of topics for the independent study paper.
199. The leadership and management of the department are very good. Results in the department have improved over the past four years. This is a significant factor in the increased numbers of students opting to study history in the sixth form. The school is committed to ensuring that standards remain high while at the same time encouraging students' independent learning and varying teaching methods. New and training teachers are very well supported and changes in staff deployment very well managed. The monitoring of teaching is collaborative and supportive. Improving results and increasing numbers are indicative of good improvement since the last inspection.

Religious studies

Provision in religious studies is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The standard of students' work is exceptionally high.
- Teaching, learning and achievement are all excellent.
- Students are keen to learn because they enjoy their lessons and are confident that they will succeed.
- Inspiring and dedicated leadership has led directly to greater numbers of students and higher standards.
- The difference between AS and A-level results in 2003 shows how great and how rapid, the improvement has been.

Commentary

200. The standard of students' work is exceptionally high. In Year 12 when considering different theories about the creation of the universe, students compare, contrast and evaluate the competing claims of religion and science. They show analytic understanding of the different views within Christianity about the nature of scriptural authority. They bring personal insight and independent thought to the opposition between creationism and theistic evolution. In Year 13, when considering the problem of evil for a theist, students recognise the logical dilemma between divine benevolence and omnipotence. In discussing the nature of the soul they display their capacity for abstract thinking. They work with Plato's ideas and respond with intellectual rigour to modern writers such as Ryle, Dawkins and Swinburne.
201. In 2002 the number of students on advanced level courses was too low for valid statistical comparison. In 2003 all candidates in Year 13 on the A-level course achieved a grade. One in three achieved grades A or B. Results at AS level, however, with 26 candidates, were very much better. Half achieved grade A and half grade B. National comparisons for 2003 were not yet available at the time of the inspection.

202. Teaching, learning and achievement are all excellent. Teachers know exactly what the examination requires. They show very detailed and accurate knowledge of content. They use language with precision and communicate with clarity. Students, therefore, make very rapid progress in their acquisition of knowledge. They develop a full grasp of issues as they arise from the study of religion and theology, philosophy and ethics. They acquire their own point of view and develop critical skills, as they compare and contrast, analyse and evaluate different scholarly theories. They learn to speak and write with authority and confidence and they know exactly how to meet the requirements of the examination. They become mature and reflective, deepening their personal insight and strengthening their independence of thought. As they make connections between different aspects of religion and human experience they develop a genuinely synoptic perspective.
203. Leadership is outstanding. The school has transformed its provision since the last inspection. The governing body now gives pupils enough time for their work in Years 9 to 11. This has been the foundation for greater success in the sixth form. Inspiring and dedicated leadership within the department plus excellent teaching have led directly to greater numbers of students and higher standards. Students have responded to the department's clarity of vision, strong sense of purpose and high aspirations. They are keen to learn and they are confident that they will succeed. They clearly enjoy their lessons and recognise the personal gain. The contribution of the subject, especially in the spiritual and moral dimensions, is excellent. The difference between A2 and AS results in 2003 shows how great and how rapid, the improvement has been.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards achieved are well above average and improving.
- Students' engagement in their work is very good.
- Students benefit from the good quality subject teaching, but sometimes there is too little intervention by the teacher.
- There is a lack of vocational learning opportunities and courses within the sixth form curriculum.
- There is a lack of specific subject reference to what students can do in the annual reports to parents.

Commentary

204. Standards in design and technology are well above average overall. In A-level food technology results over a three-year trend have been well above the national average. Results in A-level product design have been above the national average. In AS level courses a similar picture is seen in food technology. Results in AS textiles in 2003, the first year the course had been examined, were well above the national average and significantly improved in the AS product design course. A key feature of the examination results achieved by students is the high proportion who gain the upper grades of A and B in both AS and A-level courses. In 2003, 80 per cent of students entered for AS and A-level courses in design and technology achieved A or B grades. In the work seen, students' attainment was well above average. Particular strengths were seen in the level of students' design skills and graphic presentation of designs in product design and textiles. As at the last inspection, students' skills of investigation in food technology were of a very high order.
205. Students' achievement throughout Years 12 and 13 is good. Most enter Year 12 with well above average attainment at GCSE. Their gains in design skills and presentation are well

above average. Many demonstrate outstanding research and analysis in their coursework. Information and communication technology is well used for presentation and design generation. Graphic skills, particularly in the sketching of designs and the use of colour rendering are very good in graphic products and textiles. Students' knowledge and understanding are well above average in all the courses. Year 13 food technology students, for example, showed a good understanding of colloidal chemistry in relation to the use of emulsifiers and stabilisers in food products. Manufacturing skills are overall above average and weaknesses evident at the start of Year 12 are mostly made up by the end of that year.

206. Teaching and learning are good overall. Teaching is based on a depth of subject expertise and challenge to students to succeed in achieving the high standards expected. Students respond well and most are self-reliant and confident in their work. Effective questioning and thoughtful strategies of intervention usually support them in doing their best. Students in a Year 12 graphic products lesson and a Year 13 food lesson, for example, all made effective gains in their learning through the teachers' effective intervention, questioning and demonstration. Routines are well established and students use tools and equipment safely. Relationships are very good and often a mutual respect exists between students, teachers and other adults. In a minority of lessons where the teaching is only satisfactory, students are left to carry out the main activity, with too little intervention and guidance from the teacher. Assessment is overall satisfactory. Students receive good quality guidance and comment upon their achievements and know how to improve. However, the quality is not reflected in the annual report comments, which are bland and focused too much on effort.
207. Since the last inspection the breadth of the curriculum has improved and is now satisfactory overall. Additional courses in product design and textiles have improved breadth but the overall balance of the curriculum is still heavily biased to Level 3 provision (AS and A-level only) and there is currently no vocational course or learning opportunity available to students. Planning is rigorous and teaching is well organised. Enrichment and the links with local industry and commerce are satisfactory. The impact of the school's specialist science and engineering status is so far limited, but plans for September 2004 onwards are broadly appropriate and include vocational qualifications.
208. The leadership is good and there is a corporate commitment in the subject team to high standards and continued improvement. Significant weaknesses in the curriculum, accommodation and health and safety have been well addressed since the last inspection; improvement has been good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art was inspected in full and drama sampled. Music was not inspected. One Year 13 A-level drama lesson was observed. The standard of the students' physical performance was very high and the quality of teaching and learning was excellent. Students had clearly benefited from previous learning about physical theatre techniques and visits to productions, particularly by Steven Berkoff. Their achievement in translating a narrative into a devised, scripted performance was excellent. They experimented creatively with a wide range of dramatic techniques and styles.

Art

The provision for art is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The excellent leadership and very good management of the department, which promotes very high standards.
- The excellent teaching that leads to exceptional learning and achievements that are well above national standards.

- The excellent behaviour and positive commitment of students to their work, ensuring an enjoyable and industrious environment for learning.
- The high quality computers, from which students are rapidly learning to extend their work into the innovative and challenging area of digital imaging.
- Three-dimensional studies are not yet fully developed on the curriculum.

Commentary

209. This is a department that promotes very high standards of work. The number of students achieving grades A-B in both AS and A-level examinations in 2003 was broadly in line with school averages, well above national averages and above averages in similar schools. Standards show a steady rise over time.
210. Students reach these high standards because the quality of teaching is excellent and the students' very positive attitudes to work and their excellent behaviour enable them to develop as independent learners and very high achievers. Teachers have a very high level of practical expertise and an excellent command of their subject, ensuring that students can work to their full potential as they prepare for examinations. Students' sketchbooks are working notebooks that reveal the extensive research undertaken as they explore the work of artists and study their techniques and creative backgrounds. Their research is richly annotated and sketchbooks presented in creative and individually interesting ways.
211. The leadership of the very strong teaching team is exemplary and staff work very well together, ably supported by an experienced and hard working art technician. The department is managed very well and is monitored effectively to ensure that the high standards of teaching and learning are maintained over time. It has made a very good improvement since the previous inspection. Students are making very good use of the high quality computers recently made available in the department. Many use digital software on their home computers and are quick to take advantage of the professional quality software on the department computers. Three-dimensional studies are not effectively developed on the curriculum, although increasing use is being made of plaster and air-dried clay to build small models for research and investigation.

BUSINESS

One lesson of Business Studies was sampled in which students made good gains in learning through the teacher's good use of a plenary session to reinforce the lesson objectives. Teaching methods were rather repetitive, however.

VOCATIONAL COURSES

Government and politics

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching that uses challenging activities and contributes to high standards.
- Very motivated students who work hard and achieve very well.
- The programmes of work do not consistently identify refined learning objectives or the use of resources.
- The use of computers to support students' work in lessons is underdeveloped.
- Very good leadership has led to increased uptake and a focus on improvement.
- The use of plenary sessions that enable students to reflect on their learning is not sufficiently developed.

Commentary

212. In 2002 results were well above the national average, and reflected high achievement by the students. Results in 2003 indicate the continuation of a trend of improving standards in recent years.
213. Standards in the current Years 12 and 13 are well above average expectations and this represents very good achievement for the majority of students. Very good understanding is shown when students discuss the limits of prime ministerial power, which also reflects a comprehensive knowledge of modern political figures and issues. Lower ability students write basic notes that would benefit from more structure. Written and oral skills are very well developed. Students use sophisticated subject language accurately, but would benefit from the consistent use of computers in lessons to aid presentation. Essay work is well developed and most students write well-structured essays, balancing facts, opinion and giving relevant back-up examples. When evaluating and analysing, high ability students combine and contrast information very well, although those of lower ability struggle to balance analysis and description consistently.
214. Teaching and learning are very good. Students benefit from the teacher's very secure subject knowledge. Challenging activities and resources are produced that make full use of current issues. Good opportunities exist for discussion, although students do not consistently adopt a critical approach to their studies. Consolidation time in lessons reinforces students' knowledge well. Plenary time often fails to give sufficient opportunity for students to reflect on their learning. Students are extremely well motivated and respond very positively to the demands made of them.
215. Leadership of the subject is very good and has overseen a good improvement over time in standards and popularity. There is a clear focus on improvement and the effective use of monitoring to ensure the maintenance of standards. The management of the subject is good with documentation giving appropriate guidance. Long-term planning documentation would benefit from the identification of priorities, short-term target dates and success criteria.
216. The curriculum is good, balancing new and more familiar topics. It includes good self-designed units of work: introducing politics and a challenging "political ideas" unit. Programmes of study require further development to more consistently identify learning objectives, resource usage and key skills delivery. Very good assessment procedures exist, including regular assessments, focused marking and regular review interviews that establish target grades. The development of an appropriate record sheet would enable students to track their own progress and work targets and further reinforce their high quality performance.

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	2	2
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		2
Pupils' achievement	2	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		1
Attendance	3	2
Attitudes	1	1
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	1	1
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		2
The quality of education provided by the school		2
The quality of teaching	2	2
How well pupils learn	2	2
The quality of assessment	2	2
How well the curriculum meets pupils' needs	2	2
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		2
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		2
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3	2
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	2	2
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		3
The quality of the school's links with the community	2	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	3	2
The leadership and management of the school		2
The governance of the school	3	3
The leadership of the headteacher		2
The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	2	2

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

