

INSPECTION REPORT

LA SAINTE UNION CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL

London

LEA area: Camden

Unique reference number: 100059

Headteacher: Sr Teresa Finn

Lead inspector: Barbara Hilton

Dates of inspection: 8 - 11 March 2004

Inspection number: 262646

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll:	1182
School address:	Highgate Road London
Postcode:	NW5 1RP
Telephone number:	020 7428 4600
Fax number:	020 7267 7646
Appropriate authority:	Governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Sr Margaret O'Reilly
Date of previous inspection:	27 March 2000

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The La Sainte Union Catholic Secondary School is an 11-18 Roman Catholic voluntary-aided comprehensive school for girls which admits boys in the sixth form. In Years 7 to 11 all pupils are taught on the La Sainte Union site. With three other schools the sixth form is part of a well-established consortium known as La SWAP (comprising La Sainte Union Catholic Secondary, William Ellis, Acland Burghley and Parliament Hill Schools).

The school is bigger than most and heavily oversubscribed. All the pupils are Catholic. The majority come from Catholic primary schools in Camden and Islington and about 30 per cent from other boroughs around north London. The school draws on pupils from almost 90 primary schools although typically, in any year, pupils represent about 40 of these. On entry in Year 7 ability is broadly average. Pupils come from a wide range of backgrounds, and the proportion eligible for free school meals is average. About 60 per cent of pupils are white (with British and Irish backgrounds), 20 per cent African and smaller proportions are from Caribbean, Asian and other ethnic groups. About six per cent of pupils in the main school are identified as having special educational needs, and a small number of students in the sixth form. The proportions of pupils with special educational needs and with statements are below national average, but their disabilities are varied and include physical handicap. Mobility is low.

About 75 per cent of Year 11 pupils stay on in the sixth form, which is larger than most, and they are joined by other students, both girls and a small number of boys. As part of the very large La SWAP consortium, they mix with students from a very wide range of social and ethnic backgrounds, reflecting local communities.

The characteristics of the school are similar to that at the time of the last inspection. The school is in the Trusteeship of an International Congregation whose tradition is the provision of a broad Catholic education. The school has Beacon status for teaching in music and physical education, for contributing to teacher training and for sixth form arrangements. It has been awarded Investors in People status.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
3228	Barbara Hilton	Lead inspector	
9561	Husain Akhtar	Lay inspector	
15472	Paul Andrews	Team inspector	Music Special educational needs
24142	Sylvia Argyle	Team inspector	Art Media studies (sixth form)
8076	Terence Bendall	Team inspector	Design and technology
8216	Geoffrey Binks	Team inspector	English
19530	Jennifer Bray	Team inspector	Geography
23324	Sylvia Greenland	Team inspector	History
10060	David Gutmann	Team inspector	Business studies Sociology
27240	Tony Hooper	Team inspector	Classical studies Citizenship
19925	Margaret Price	Team inspector	Mathematics
10288	John Richards	Team inspector	Information and communication technology Art (sixth form)
23030	Caroline Runyard	Team inspector	Physical education
1795	Joyce Sanderson	Team inspector	Drama English as an additional language
6364	Geoffrey Strack	Team inspector	Science Biology (sixth form)
4829	Ian Waters	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages (French, German and Spanish)

The inspection contractor was:

Cambridge Education Associates

Demeter House
Station Road
Cambridge
CB1 2RS

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school is very good. Pupils are enthusiastic about learning. Their very good attitudes are cultivated by the very positive ethos of the school and enable them to make the most of their lessons, and achieve high GCSE results. Teaching and learning are consistently good with significant strengths. Leadership is very good.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- High results are consistently achieved at the end of Year 9 and GCSE
- Relationships and pupils' personal (spiritual, moral, social and cultural) development are excellent, strongly supported by the school's religious foundation
- Teachers have a strong sense of commitment and use their very good subject knowledge to provide interesting lessons in which pupils learn well
- Assessment is not systematically used to inform younger pupils of how they are doing and to set targets for improvement
- Procedures for monitoring the attendance and punctuality of sixth formers lack rigour
- Strong partnership with parents cultivates enthusiasm for learning very effectively
- Very good leadership promotes the very positive and caring ethos
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory for drama and for sixth form study and recreation and not efficiently organised for English and history.

The school has progressed satisfactorily since the last inspection and maintains a strong position at the top of the local league tables of results. Sixth form results have improved slightly since the last inspection. Teaching is a little better now, with several notable strengths. Key issues of the last report, including timing of the school day and the monitoring of teaching, have been tackled but shortcomings remain in provision of the National Curriculum in design and technology and information and communication technology (ICT). Through its Beacon status the school has enhanced its provision and links with other schools. Developments include application for specialist school status in science. The school has good capacity to improve further.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Pupils' overall results are well above the national averages at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE; their achievement at GCSE is very good. Results in many subjects are well above the national averages for girls and in English, mathematics and science are consistently high. All groups of pupils, including those of minority ethnic backgrounds, achieve highly. Results reflect very well on the achievement of pupils who are at an early stage of learning English or have special educational needs. Standards in lessons are above average and pupils progress well throughout and more quickly in Years 10 and 11 than lower down the school. Standards are particularly high in English and in Years 10 and 11 in mathematics, art and music. Literacy and numeracy skills are above average throughout the school. **Sixth form students generally achieve well and work at above course expectations.** However, because of lateness in lessons and absence, examination results are average, overall. In lessons, students from this and other schools in the sixth form consortium achieve similarly well, and there is little difference in examination results.

Pupils are very enthusiastic about learning. Their attitudes and behaviour are very good. The school is a very harmonious community. **The strong ethos, based on the Catholic faith,**

permeates all aspects of school life and supports excellently the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and sixth formers. Attendance is unsatisfactory. In the main school this is mostly due to the authorised absence of a few pupils. However, the high level of their interest in education means that absence, though discouraged, has little impact on achievement. In Years 12 and 13, absence and lateness to lessons hinder students' progress over courses which are only of a year's duration. The attitudes of sixth formers are good and their behaviour is very good. In lessons they work hard and apply themselves well in an atmosphere of mutual respect.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided is good, with very good features: teachers are experts in their subjects, plan interesting lessons and readily help those who need support, in a climate of excellent relationships. **Pupils learn well because teaching is good, as in mathematics and science. In several subjects much teaching and learning are very good, as in English, geography, history, art, drama, music and physical education.** Pupils develop good work habits. When they have the scope to evaluate and develop ideas they progress very well, as in art, drama and music. Their expectations are high, reflecting the high standards expected by their teachers. The challenge in lessons is relatively higher in Years 10 and 11 than lower down the school where sometimes more able pupils are able to coast. Pupils with special educational or language needs are supported very well and keep up with the rest. Work is regularly marked and pupils know broadly how they are doing but, except in English, younger pupils receive little specific information on how they are achieving relative to national expectations. Assessment is used better with older pupils and in the sixth form, where progress is systematically reviewed.

The curriculum is good in the main school. Pupils study a broad range of subjects up to GCSE. Requirements are met, except for aspects of the National Curriculum in ICT and design and technology. The range of extra-curricular activities is good overall, and excellent in music and science. The school copes well with its accommodation, features of which are inadequate, including space for drama and for the sixth form, and room allocations for English and history, which are inefficient. **Pastoral care is good. Advice and guidance based on systematic monitoring of pupils' academic performance are satisfactory** in the main school. **Partnership between parents, church and the school strongly support its work and ethos.**

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Overall leadership and management are very good. The school is well governed; while National Curriculum requirements are not fully met in ICT and design and technology, governors have plans to strengthen both. Leadership by the headteacher and key staff is very good. Management is good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form, where monitoring of attendance lacks rigour. The main school provides good value for money.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents are strongly supportive of the school and happy about sixth form arrangements. Pupils are very positive about many aspects of the school, particularly its friendliness and caring ethos. The school is ready to listen to pupils' views and has formal opportunities for doing so, but a minority of pupils has reservations about how their views are accommodated into plans.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

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

- Regularly inform younger pupils of their progress relative to the National Curriculum through the marking of their work and systematic review of their progress
- Strengthen the monitoring of sixth form attendance and punctuality so that data are systematically available and can be used in reviewing progress and setting targets
- Pursue vigorously plans for improving accommodation

and, to meet statutory requirements: improve curricular planning in design and technology, and also in ICT, both in separately taught lessons and across the curriculum.

THE SIXTH FORM AT LA SAINTE UNION CATHOLIC SECONDARY SCHOOL

The large sixth form is part of the La SWAP consortium of four local sixth forms and provides a wide range of academic and vocational courses.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form is good. **Students learn and achieve well in lessons. The quality of education provided is good. Examination results, which are in line with those nationally, reflect satisfactory added-value but are not as high as standards in lessons** indicate because learning too frequently is interrupted by absence. **Three-quarters of the students go on to university. Satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection; teaching and results are a little better and the course offer is wider. The sixth form is cost-effective.**

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Teachers are experts in their subjects and provide challenging and interesting lessons which enable students to progress well
- Through strong and supportive links with nearby schools the consortium provides an extensive range of courses and the freedom for students to take responsibility for themselves
- Arrangements for reviewing progress and targets for improvement set by students help to focus learning
- Students too frequently are late for lessons or absent and monitoring arrangements are not effective enough to minimise this
- Accommodation for study and recreation is inadequate for student numbers

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form at La Sainte Union Catholic Secondary School 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	Good in English , in which students achieve well because teaching and learning are very good. Standards, teaching and learning are improving in French and are now satisfactory , but constrained by irregular attendance.
Mathematics	Satisfactory in mathematics : students learn well in response to good teaching.
Science	Good in biology , in which very good teaching enables students to learn well.
Humanities	Very good in sociology and good in geography : teaching and learning are very good in both subjects. Good in classical studies : students achieve very well in response to good teaching. Satisfactory in history in which poor attendance and punctuality limit the effectiveness of good teaching and learning in lessons.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Good in design and technology (textiles) , in which teaching and learning are good.
Visual and performing arts and media	Very good in art, music and media studies : very good teaching enables students to learn and achieve highly.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Excellent in physical education : outstandingly good teaching and learning enable students to achieve very highly.
Business	Satisfactory in business , in which teaching, learning and achievement are satisfactory.
General education	Good: the critical thinking course , and tutorial programme effectively support students' academic learning and plans for progression.

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

Good: students' progress is well-supported by subject teachers and the tutorial programme. The induction programme is very well planned. Students understand how they are doing through regular review of their progress which helps to focus their learning. They are prepared well for university, and supported by the many links between the school and higher education. While the importance of attendance and punctuality are stressed by subject teachers, guidance by tutors is not supported by systematic monitoring information.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Good: leadership is strong, governance and overall planning are good. Management is satisfactory. On a day-to-day basis curricular and teaching arrangements work well. However, a weakness of management is the inability to account on a daily basis for attendance, although individual students can be tracked through teachers' registers. Plans are in hand to install an electronic system, in line with developments in Camden. Absence and lateness are limiting the effectiveness of provision which is good, so that students' achievement in examinations is just satisfactory. Finances are managed well.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students like many features of the sixth form and would like it to be consistently good in all its work, with more opportunities for enrichment activities, and advice on their work and personal development; inspectors found both to be good, relative to most sixth forms. Students also feel that the school does not seek and value their views, and this is shared with younger pupils. In the very caring climate of the school, this seems to be due to differences in perception between staff and students.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Results at the end of Year 9 and in the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) examinations are consistently high. **Pupils achieve well in lessons throughout and their GCSE results reflect very good achievement, especially across Years 10 and 11.**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is very good: results at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE are well above the national averages and at the top end of results in Camden
- Results in many subjects are well above the national averages for all schools and for girls
- Pupils with special educational or language needs are supported and achieve very well but there is not enough challenge, especially in younger classes, to stretch the most able
- Pupils of all backgrounds achieve very well
- Standards of literacy and numeracy are good
- Challenging targets are used effectively to maintain high standards

Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	37.0 (36.3)	33.4 (33.3)
Mathematics	36.8 (37.7)	35.4 (34.7)
science	36.2 (36.5)	33.6 (33.3)

There were 184 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	75 (79)	52 (50)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	97 (97)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (99)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	43.2 (42.8)	34.7 (34.7)

There were 177 pupils in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

1. **Results in Year 9 have been improving faster than those nationally and are well above both the overall national average and the national average for girls.** Results in English and science are a little stronger than those in mathematics, where there is scope for raising yet further the achievement of more able pupils. Teacher assessments in other subjects reflect standards which are in line with those nationally and sometimes better, as in geography, history and physical education. Relative to the scores in standardised tests of ability taken by pupils in Year 7, achievement in Year 9 is well above average.
2. **GCSE results are well above average and much better than in other schools where pupils have achieved similar results in Year 9.** Virtually all pupils achieve one or more

GCSE passes, a good majority gain five or more subjects at higher grades (A*-C) and in 2003 the proportion of the highest grades (A*,A) increased. While overall the results when compared with the national results for girls are above average, results in many subjects are much better than the averages for girls nationally, as in English, mathematics, science, art, design and technology, drama, history, music, physical education, sociology and Spanish. Last year staffing changes affected pupils' progress in French, especially in speaking, which pulled down results. Results have been consistently high for many years - parents praised this, at their meeting. Unlike in other schools, however, the results have reached a plateau. The number of subjects taken at GCSE (eight, including double award science, by most pupils) is not high compared with some schools and they are not supplemented with vocational courses. Pupils of all minority ethnic backgrounds achieve highly - their GCSE results are considerably better than the Local Education Authority averages; in 2003 the highest results in the school were obtained by black Asian and white pupils. Pupils with special educational or language needs achieve in line with the rest. Pupils are prepared well for examinations. Effective use is made of challenging targets to raise GCSE results.

3. **Overall, standards in lessons are above average and better in Years 10 and 11 than in earlier years.** Standards are particularly high in English and in Years 10 and 11 in mathematics, art and music. Pupils achieve well in all years because they are diligent learners and well taught. They make particularly good gains in their learning in English, history and music and in Years 10 and 11 in art and physical education. While overall achievement is above average in design and technology, inadequate coverage of the National Curriculum limits pupils' progress in aspects of the subject in Years 7 to 9. They develop good literacy skills which help them in all their work. Numeracy skills are also good. Standards are average in information and communication technology (ICT) lessons, but in several subjects, including science, mathematics, design and technology and art, opportunities are missed for the development of ICT and subject skills. In lessons, no difference was observed in the achievement of groups of pupils of different backgrounds. Pupils at an early stage of learning English and those with special educational needs are well supported and helped to do their best; in lessons they progress well.

Sixth form

In lessons standards are above average and students achieve well. Results are average overall, reflecting satisfactory achievement from GCSE.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in art, media studies, physical education and Spanish are well above average
- Examination results do not reflect the above average standards and good progress in lessons because performance is constrained by students' irregular attendance and lateness
- Results of the business studies vocational course are well below average
- Students from La SWAP consortium do well in the subjects they study at the school
- Boys who join in the sixth form achieve good results

Commentary

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	89.9 (89.0)	91.5 (90.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	35.8 (33.7)	36.1 (35.5)
Average point score per student	247.3 (248.8)	253.1 (254.5)

There were 111 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

4. **Sixth form results in Advanced-level (A-level) examinations of the General Certificate of Education (GCE) are average, and reflect satisfactory added-value** from students' results at GCSE. The great majority of La Sainte Union students are girls, but the few boys who join Year 12 achieve well relative to their earlier GCSE scores. Similarly, students from other La SWAP schools who study at La Sainte Union generally achieve well in their examinations. Results in this commentary refer to results of students (including boys) at La Sainte Union and these are tabulated later in this report. Results were closely similar for mixed groups of students from across the consortium taught at the school. The table of results also includes a few subjects (for example, drama and other social studies) studied by La Sainte Union students but taught elsewhere in the consortium. Numbers of students taught elsewhere were relatively small and their results overall were average.
5. Standards and results in several creative subjects - art, media studies and sports studies, and also in aspects of music - are generally well above average. Results in English literature in 2003 were above average, as were results in geography and sociology. In science subjects (biology, chemistry and physics) 2003 results were in line with the national averages, as were results in drama and in classical studies (which represents very good achievement, as students start classical studies with no experience of the subject since primary school). Although all students passed mathematics, results were not as good in 2003 as in the preceding year, because fewer students achieved high grades than is nationally the case. The reasons for low results in business and economics have been considered and improvements made: results are expected to be much better this year. Students studying vocational courses at Level 2 achieve well; standards are good.
6. **Standards in sixth form lessons are above average overall and students from all backgrounds and schools generally progress well.** The mix of students from across the consortium taught at La Sainte Union stimulates debate and fosters understanding of different perspectives. However, erratic attendance and poor punctuality constrain how well students achieve overall, and their examination results. Students have satisfactory literacy and numeracy skills but, as lower down the school, do not have enough opportunities to practise their ICT skills. The few students with special educational needs and those at an early stage of learning English achieve well, in line with others. A good system of reviewing progress and target-setting is in place which effectively fosters students' learning but has not been successful in eliminating absence which jeopardises overall achievement and results. Since the last inspection the number of subjects sixth form students study for examinations has increased, with the introduction of AS and A2-levels. Overall, results have improved in line with those nationally.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The pupils have very good attitudes and behave very well. They respect highly the values of others. Their **personal (spiritual, moral, social and cultural) development is cultivated strongly through the school's very positive ethos which reflects its religious foundation.** Attendance is unsatisfactory, due mainly to the authorised absence of a very few pupils.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils are very enthusiastic about learning
- Pupils' personal development is excellent, especially their understanding and concern for moral issues
- The school council does not deal vigorously enough with items perceived as important by the pupils
- Staff are good role models and relationships are excellent

Commentary

7. Attendance was satisfactory at the last inspection but is now unsatisfactory mainly because of circumstances surrounding a small number of pupils and due to family holidays in term-times. Although such absences are discouraged, action taken by the school has not had as wide an impact as staff had hoped. Absence in the main school has little measurable impact on pupils' achievement because of their high level of interest in education. Unauthorised absence is below the national average. Punctuality is satisfactory. Movement across the school site sometimes delays the start of lessons.
8. As at the last inspection, pupils have very positive attitudes towards education, understanding that it offers enjoyment and satisfaction as well as contributing to examination success. Parents are strongly of the view that the school enables their daughters to become mature and independent. Pupils appreciate particularly its friendliness and caring ethos. Behaviour in all age groups is very good. On occasion, there is some noisy or low-level disruption in lessons, usually linked to the quality of teaching. Pupils say there is very little bullying and that if it occurs teachers deal with it calmly and very effectively. The school is very well ordered. Pupils behave sensibly and are considerate, throughout.
9. The Catholic faith is central to the school's ethos. It is promoted through religious education lessons, a programme of assemblies and Masses as well as yearly retreats, and strengthened through the partnership between the school, parishes and parents. The result is a very positive ethos permeating all aspects of school life. Pupils respect highly the values of others and try hard to understand motives and actions. Teachers encourage exploration of fundamental and universal issues as opportunities arise. The school's high expectations of behaviour help pupils to understand moral questions. They grasp the need for justice in world-wide issues. All subjects cultivate cultural interests, often using the diverse backgrounds of the pupils, such as a Gospel Choir and a Philippino dance group. The school is a very harmonious community. Relationships are excellent. Many visits are arranged, some of which involve small numbers and cater for more specialised interests. Opportunities in art, drama and music contribute strongly to pupils' cultural development. Social development is very good. Pupils have many opportunities to collaborate very well together in lessons and activities. Among teachers and pupils there is respect and trust. Pupils develop in self-confidence, and are willing to defend their own opinions vigorously while showing consideration for different values. They willingly accept responsibility and raise much money for charities. Selected Year 10 pupils follow a leadership course and later become mentors to Year 7 pupils. Pupils say they are trusted to do things on their own but a significant minority feels the school does not take their views seriously.

Sixth form

Students' attitudes are good and behaviour very good. Attendance and punctuality are unsatisfactory and detract from overall achievement. **Overall, students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.**

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attendance and procedures for monitoring and supporting this are unsatisfactory
- Students' personal development is very good
- Students work hard in lessons and are enthusiastic about sixth form arrangements
- The sixth form operates as a well-ordered and harmonious community

Commentary

10. No coherent system is in place for recording students' attendance. Sampling students' attendance in subjects generates some but not enough data to promptly follow up absences or effectively monitor attendance. Erratic attendance and punctuality significantly hinder the

progress of students concerned. Travel between sites is a contributing factor and the school, because of its caring ethos, supports some students through the sixth form who might otherwise drift away from education. Plans are in hand to introduce an electronic registration system to cover the four sixth forms in the consortium.

11. Students' attitudes to learning are good. In lessons they generally work hard and apply themselves well in an atmosphere of mutual respect. In art, music, physical education and sociology students' excellent attitudes contributed strongly to successful lessons observed. However, more relaxed attitudes were noted, both towards attendance and also occasionally in lessons, for example, in business and in chemistry, when a few students seemed reluctant to engage with the topic but were happy to listen to the teacher. Frequently students make extensive efforts to complete coursework and through this gain considerably in self-confidence and skills, as noted in art and in product design-fashion.
12. Opportunities for students' personal development occur frequently in lessons and the life of the school. The sixth form shares much accommodation with the main school and those who wish can participate in activities which stem from its religious foundation, assist with younger pupils, charities and participate in the enrichment programme. Students consider fundamental issues as opportunities arise in lessons, for example, in English and in physics. Through careers guidance support students receive an evaluation of their qualities and skills. Students' social development is strongly supported. Their social group expands from that with which they have been familiar with for five years to include three other schools and diverse experiences. Students have a strong sense of right and wrong and readily state their views on moral issues. These qualities, developed in earlier years, are fostered in lessons and when ethical questions are considered, as in history and sociology. An Amnesty International group meets regularly at lunchtimes. Cultural awareness is nurtured in many subjects, including art, music, classical studies, modern foreign languages, geography and media studies. The school community is ethically very mixed and very harmonious. Students appreciate its diversity and the enrichment this brings.
13. Students are enthusiastic about the sixth form consortium and find it a valuable stepping stone to the wider world and higher education. They appreciate the challenging teaching and the thoroughness with which their work is assessed. They say teachers are accessible and helpful and students get on very well together. In several areas, students feel there is room for improvement, for example, in the range of enrichment activities and availability of advice. In both of these, students' responses may have been affected by the timing of the questionnaire or the dissemination of information, because both are good, relative to most schools. They also feel that the school does not take their views seriously. This is shared with younger pupils and may be due to differences in perception between staff and students, and is worthy of exploration by the school.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence	
School data	8.7
National data	7.2

Unauthorised absence	
School data	0.3
National data	1.1

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

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	457	15	0
White – Irish	153	5	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	10	2	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	21	2	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	55	2	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	42	2	0
Black or Black British – African	221	8	0
Any other ethnic group	61	1	0

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

14. Fixed period exclusions have increased since the last inspection, but are not high. They have mostly been one-off exclusions for serious offences and for a short period. They are closely monitored. No pupils have been permanently excluded in the last few years.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided is **good with very good features**.

Teaching and learning

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 176 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
6 (3%)	56 (32%)	75 (43%)	38 (21%)	1 (1%)	0	0

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

Main school

Pupils learn well because teaching is **good, with notable strengths**. Assessment is well used for older pupils but its use with younger pupils is inconsistent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good command of their subjects and use this to plan interesting activities
- Relationships are excellent and help to create a good atmosphere for learning
- Support for those with special educational or language needs is very good
- Expectations are generally high but at times, especially in younger classes, more could be expected of gifted and talented pupils
- In most subjects opportunities are missed to involve pupils in raising standards because they do not know how they are doing relative to the National Curriculum, and what this means
- Pupils are interested, keen to learn and develop good study habits

Commentary

15. Pupils' enthusiasm about learning and well-planned, systematic teaching help them to develop good work habits. In several subjects much teaching is very good, as in English, geography, history, art, drama, music and physical education, and this accelerates pupils' learning. Teaching is a little better than at the last inspection, virtually all teaching being satisfactory or better now.
16. Teachers' command of their subjects is very good. A strength is their use of their knowledge to plan an interesting range of activities which helps pupils to progress effectively. For example, in a Year 9 mathematics lesson, pupils' understanding of percentages was effectively developed, first through opportunities to practise mental calculations and then through exploration of different ways of finding percentages. In English, teachers draw very effectively on their knowledge to develop pupils' understanding both of language and also of literature. Teachers in all subjects pay good attention to literacy, as in history, where planning is thorough. In most subjects pupils have good opportunities for speaking and their oral skills develop well. Pupils learn to apply their understanding of number and mathematical ideas as opportunities occur in other subjects, for example, in science and geography, and cope well. Numeracy is being strengthened through a more systematic approach across the curriculum. Pupils do not have enough opportunities to develop their ICT skills through work in other subjects, although good examples of ICT were seen in English, art and music.
17. Teachers' expectations are high so pupils have high expectations of their own behaviour and work. The challenge in lessons is relatively higher in Years 10 and 11 than lower down the school where sometimes more able pupils have opportunity to coast, rather than tackle more difficult work, as observed occasionally in mathematics, and in modern foreign languages, where pupils are not expected to use the foreign language enough themselves. High expectations in physical education, together with very good planning and organisation, support the development of pupils' theoretical understanding alongside their practical skills and very effectively raise standards. Pupils at an early stage of learning English are supported very well and sometimes are prepared in advance of lessons for the next stage of their work. Accurate assessments and well-planned support enable pupils with special educational needs to keep up in their classes. Homework is used effectively.
18. Teachers and pupils respect each other and the atmosphere in lessons is harmonious. This helps pupils to develop confidence and to discuss issues openly, as observed in topics in citizenship and personal, social and health education. Pupils are known well individually and good support is provided to help them do their best. In art, for example, there is much one-to-one guidance. Evaluation of performance is frequent in drama, music and physical education. This raises pupils' awareness of what they do well and how to improve and helps to lift standards. Work is regularly marked and all pupils understand broadly how well they are doing but, except in English, they receive little specific information on how they are doing relative to national expectations or course requirements. Teachers regularly discuss with each other pupils' progress and how they can be supported to do better. In Years 10 and 11 pupils know the grades they are working towards and the standard of their current work; the lack of sharing targets is with younger pupils.
19. Over the recent past staff changes have affected teaching in several subjects, geography, history and modern foreign languages, in particular. Now that stability has returned, continuity of teaching and learning has been restored. The school is committed to continuing professional development and this is well focused on raising standards. Participation in teacher training brings new ideas into the classroom, as in art. Beacon status has resulted in younger pupils visiting the school which has raised awareness of their potential, especially in music and physical education. In these various ways the school is outward-looking and achieves consistently good teaching. Pupils and parents appreciate this and recognise that pupils are expected to work hard and do their best.

The curriculum

The curriculum, including extra-curricular activities, is **good** but there are unsatisfactory features in accommodation. Resources are good overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students study a wide range of subjects up to GCSE
- Statutory requirements are not fully met in design and technology and ICT
- Extra-curricular activities are good, and excellent in music and science
- Personal, social and health education, including careers education, is good
- The range of vocational courses and opportunities for accelerated learning are limited
- Very good quality staff effectively promote learning
- Weaknesses in accommodation affect pupils' learning in several subjects
- Access to ICT is difficult for some subjects and restricts its use
- The library stock is not extensive enough for the numbers of students and courses

Commentary

20. The curriculum is broad up to GCSE, and is well balanced in terms of arts, humanities, languages and science, but includes limited vocational opportunities. Plans are in hand to strengthen these and develop 14 to 19 progression opportunities. Citizenship has been introduced well. Choice is good in science, including opportunities to take single science subjects (biology, chemistry and physics) to GCSE. All pupils study one modern foreign language up to GCSE but they do not have opportunity to take examinations in two (except for bilingual pupils who are encouraged to continue with their home language). French is the first language studied and their choice is informed by opportunity to study a second (German or Spanish) for one year in Year 8. As a Catholic school, a necessary proportion of time is devoted to religious education and this restricts the expansion of other subjects.
21. While in most subjects the curriculum is well planned, in two the National Curriculum is not implemented in full, namely in design and technology (the use of electronics and computer control) and ICT (the use of ICT for controlling and automating events and the depth and breadth in which some aspects are studied). ICT is not fully integrated into all schemes of work, as in mathematics and science, and its use is further restricted by the inaccessibility of computers for some subject rooms, such as in history. In science, opportunities for investigation have been strengthened in Year 7 and extension is planned for Years 8 and 9. Good emphasis is placed on literacy, which supports pupils' achievement in all subjects. A good start has been made in developing numeracy systematically across the curriculum.
22. Provision for pupils with special educational needs is very good. Procedures are clear and effective. Pupils' Individual Education Plans are very well composed with appropriate and worthwhile targets. Pupils who are beginning to learn English are taught individually in lessons or in free time or after school. Liaison between language and subject teachers is very good and pupils are often prepared in advance for their lessons, as in English and history. Gifted and talented pupils have been identified but support for them, while adequate, is uneven. It is good in English, history, music and physical education but, particularly in younger years and in mathematics and design and technology, pupils could be challenged more. Older pupils have a few opportunities to accelerate their learning. They can take separate sciences at GCSE and take GCSE mathematics in Year 10.
23. The programme of extra-curricular activities is good and effectively reinforces the curriculum. Provision is excellent in science and music and good in physical education. Beacon funding has been well used in physical education and music to enhance both lessons and the life of the school. Fieldwork enhances learning in geography. Very few opportunities are available for pupils to develop their interests in design and technology and there are limited links with foreign

countries to broaden horizons and develop language skills. The school offers many other activities which contribute well towards pupils' personal development. For example, the debating society and Amnesty International give students insight into social issues. Regular drama productions develop teamwork and a range of theatrical skills.

24. Personal, social and health education lessons ensure that students have a good depth of knowledge of the required topics of health and sex education and drugs awareness and topics are sensitively-handled but pupils have expressed frustration at some repetition. Careers education and preparation for continuing education are well organised. Work experience arrangements for students in Year 10 are carefully co-ordinated and monitored.
25. The curriculum is good, as at the last inspection. Subject breadth and choice were good than, as they are now. Two weaknesses remain: not all the required aspects of design and technology are covered and, while improvements have been made in ICT, more remains to be done in order that provision matches the National Curriculum.
26. Staff stability and expertise, particularly in art, drama, music, sociology and physical education, have a most favourable impact on the quality of teaching and learning. Resources for learning vary but are generally good enough to support the curriculum. They are very good in music, physical education and drama. Non-fiction books are limited and library facilities are generally inadequate to develop literacy and research skills. Specialist rooms support the curriculum well but accommodation is only satisfactory overall. Lack of subject bases in English and history and unsatisfactory accommodation in drama have implications for teaching and learning. The school has sensible plans to improve accommodation.

Sixth form

The consortium provides an extensive range of courses. The quality of provision in lessons taught at La Sainte Union is **good with significant strengths**. Students learn well in response to good teaching. Teachers have expert knowledge of their subjects and lessons are challenging.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are good and assessment much better used than lower down the school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Lessons are well planned and organised to move students on in their learning
- Assessment is well used for monitoring students' progress
- Students' performance in examinations is not as good as in lessons because too often their learning is interrupted by absence or lateness

Commentary

27. Most students learn well, and very well when there is much very good teaching, as in biology, art, geography, music, media studies and sociology. Learning and teaching in physical education are excellent. Students make good gains in knowledge and understanding because teachers are experts in their subjects and plan challenging lessons. In English, for example, students make very good gains in scrutinising texts and understanding central themes, drawing on teachers' detailed knowledge and class discussion of social and cultural contexts. Similarly, in mathematics, explanations are very clear and, in mechanics, sometimes illustrated by practical example. In music, the teacher used his own high-level musical score-reading to deepen insight into the harmonics which give an 'other worldliness' in Britten's *War Requiem*. Similarly, teachers' very good knowledge of the subject and examination requirements help students to emphasise key points in classical studies and to improve their designs in textiles. Effective focus on vocabulary in French and German strengthens students'

- knowledge but in French, as lower down the school, few opportunities are provided for students to develop their speaking skills in the foreign language.
28. Activities are apt and engage interest. In a Year 12 biology lesson, for example, a well chosen starter activity captured students' interest in cell structure and the genetics of reproduction. In art, very effective use is made of sketchbooks, so students develop their ideas well, extend them through discussion and presentations, and improve their work. Opportunities for students to understand relevant concepts are limited in business because teachers do not use enough case studies in real business examples. Generally lessons provide good opportunity for the development of communication and other core skills, including application of number and working with others. More frequent reference is made to the use of ICT in lessons than in the main school, for example, in physics, business studies, music, textiles and Spanish, but opportunities in lessons to use ICT as a tool for learning are uneven. Many students use ICT to present their own work and for research.
 29. Students develop good analytical skills, which are fostered through discussion and well focused questions, as observed in history when Year 12 students were learning about the English Civil War and in geography, when Year 13 students studied a topic about fire hazards in Australia. Students are keen to draw on their own experience and this is capitalised on, for example, in media studies and sociology. The range of experience and backgrounds of students from other schools in the La SWAP consortium enrich discussion. Assessment is better used to promote learning than in the main school. Teachers gauge students' understanding through questions and discussion, and in some lessons through worksheets and evaluations (as in French). Students' work is checked regularly and they understand how well they are doing through marks and regular assessments. Effective use is made of targets to raise students' standards.
 30. Teachers are enthusiastic about their subjects and helping students to learn. This is infectious and helps to create a very positive atmosphere and excellent relationships. Students and their parents appreciate that teaching is good. The great majority of students recognise that teachers are specialists in their subjects, present challenging work and are helpful if they have difficulties. The few students who are at an early stage of learning English or have special educational needs are supported well and keep up in their classes. The overall good teaching has been sustained since the last inspection.

The curriculum

The curriculum provided is **very good**. Weaknesses in accommodation detract from the generally good level of resources.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The consortium of four schools provides a very good choice of courses
- The enrichment programme is good and supports the students' learning
- Very good links with universities together with careers advice give students good insight into continuing educational opportunities
- Accommodation and resources do not satisfactorily support students' independent learning

Commentary

31. The unusually wide choice of academic subjects and a good range of vocational courses motivate students to stay on and join the extended school community in the consortium. Extra-curricular activities include visits to the theatre, scientific events and many visits to the school by artists and specialists providing work shops. Unusual activities include the shoe making club, linked to the media studies course. Many other strong links exist with establishments such as the BBC, local theatre and particular universities. Preparation for careers and higher education is good. Work experience is newly introduced for students in business studies and is having a positive impact on learning. As lower down the school, few

visits or exchanges are arranged for students of modern foreign languages and there are no foreign language assistants.

32. As in the main school, staffing and lesson resources are good. However, the library stock, study and common room facilities are not satisfactory to support students' independent learning. Accommodation is under pressure due to the sixth form numbers exceeding the roll because of the consortium arrangements.

Care, guidance and support

Relationships are excellent, with the result that pupils, as at the last inspection, receive good quality pastoral support. Pupils are correctly advised about subject, course and career options. Advice and guidance based on systematic monitoring of pupils' academic performance are satisfactory. There are adequate opportunities for pupils to air their views.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The strong caring and sharing ethos promotes a calm and harmonious learning environment
- A good induction process effectively supports pupils new to the school
- Staff are vigilant about health and safety matters; pupils feel safe and secure
- Guidance on progress is better in Years 10 and 11 than in earlier years
- Child protection arrangements are in place; vulnerable pupils are warmly looked after

Commentary

33. Pupils feel the school is friendly and caring. Pastoral care, involving heads of year and senior managers, is well organised. A warm-hearted Chaplain who also acts as a counsellor strengthens this further. Good links with the many feeder primary schools help smooth transition into the school. Older students act as mentors to younger pupils, giving them a further sense of security. Pupils are effectively advised about personal matters and, with the help of external agencies, about academic options and careers. The sixth form consortium arrangements provide effective continuity from Year 11 to the sixth form. The personal, health and social education programme raises pupils' awareness of relevant matters. First aid procedures are in place, equipment is well maintained and awareness of safety is good. Building-related risks are regularly assessed. A designated teacher for child protection understands agreed procedures and keeps others informed. Pupils are generally well served by the relevant external agencies, the visiting specialists, counsellors and clergy.
34. Teachers know their pupils well, have information on their standards at important stages and are sensitive to their personal circumstances. Arrangements for assessing and reporting pupils' progress are satisfactory. The systems to check individual achievement against agreed targets and use this information to support pupils' performance are satisfactory and better in Years 10 and 11 than lower down the school. In Years 7 to 9 there is little dialogue with pupils about how they are achieving relative to the National Curriculum and no ready means in the school for systematic collation and analysis of progress across subjects. It is intended to adopt a computerised system which will make available such information. The reporting system, pastoral meetings and exchange of information amongst staff provide further means of monitoring pupils' personal development. These, along with the system of rewards and sanctions, provide deterrent for any oppressive behaviour such as bullying. Pupils with special educational needs and those at an early stage of learning English are well supported and their progress is effectively monitored. The school is ready to listen to pupils' views and provides formal opportunities like the school council and the leadership conference for Year 11. However, pupils have reservations about how their views are accommodated in plans.

Sixth form

Students receive good guidance and support on their courses through subject teachers and pastoral arrangements.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Guidance on sixth form opportunities is good
- Students understand how they are doing through regular review on their progress
- Guidance on progression after the sixth form is good

Commentary

35. Students receive good careers advice. They benefit from high quality personal counselling and support for their education from adults whom they trust and respect. The programme for the induction of students new in the sixth form is satisfactory. Assessment procedures are well-managed and academic progress is systematically monitored and tracked across the curriculum. On a regular basis assessments are discussed with students and challenging targets agreed for improvement. These arrangements for reviewing progress are much better than in the main school but not yet rigorously used throughout. Students are supported very effectively when applying for opportunities at the end of the sixth form.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

As at the time of the last inspection, parents are very supportive of the school. Very effective links with other schools and colleges enhance learning experiences for pupils. Partnership between parents, church and the school strongly support its work and ethos.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Links with parents have strong impact on pupils' learning
- The church community is a strong, supportive presence
- Links with further and higher education are very effective
- Business links, while satisfactory, are not a significant feature of the school

Commentary

36. The school encourages parents to become involved in the education of their children and has the confidence of all communities. Parents receive examination grade sheets, annual reports, and information about the school. The school prospectus and the governors' annual report are useful publications. Pupils' annual progress reports to parents contain details of what pupils have been studying but do not adequately inform the parents of what they can do to raise their children's achievement. However, these annual reports are supplemented by the school's welcoming approach. Parents have regular opportunities to discuss their children's progress. Form tutors and teachers responsible for learning and language support are very helpful. The school can rely on most parents' support in dealing with problems related to their children's learning and development. Attendance at formal and informal meetings is good. Pupils' journals maintain good communication between school and home. The parents' association is active and holds social events and raises substantial money for the school. Parents' links are further strengthened through parishes and the life of the church. Priests and members of religious communities are regularly in school and provide counselling services for pupils and assistance in many practical ways.
37. Liaison with feeder primary schools is effective, supporting smooth transition into Year 7. A wide range of support for primary schools is fostered through the school's Beacon status. The school works closely with other schools and in its sixth form provision. Links with colleges and

universities effectively support the next stage of learning and generate a lot of interest about education amongst pupils. The school supports the placement of university students in classes. This creates an additional group of adults to support pupils' learning and an additional range of appropriate role models. Direct links with industry and business strengthen support vocational courses, but these are not well developed throughout. Pupils benefit from educational visits, in science, but these are not a strong feature. Both parents and pupils would appreciate more visits, particularly in support of modern foreign languages.

Sixth form

Parents and students are happy with the sixth form provision. Links with the wider community are very good overall.

Main strengths and weaknesses in the sixth form

- Communication with parents is good
- Consortium arrangements are well established and effectively support the sixth form provision
- Links with higher education are strong
- Appreciation of the business ethic is less strongly developed, overall

Commentary

38. Effective partnership with parents supports students' work in the sixth form. Parents are kept well informed about the progress of their daughters and sons through tutor reviews and consultation meetings both at this and other schools in the consortium. The large consortium accepts all students from participating schools who satisfy relevant course entry requirements. It is popular and seen as a stepping stone to university, to where about 75 per cent of students progress. Students appreciate its very wide course offer and the increased freedom it brings, while they retain links with their 'home' school. In addition to students from the four participating schools the consortium admits students from elsewhere and these places, about 30 per cent of the total, are heavily oversubscribed.
39. As in the main school, many links exist with the church community which support students and the curriculum. The wider community and businesses support the curriculum and career choices in several areas including design and technology, art, music, media studies, music and physical education, but such links could be strengthened and work experience is limited to those on vocational courses. Links with higher education are strong. Partnership with University College London enriches the curriculum and effectively raises awareness of opportunities in higher education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The school is very well led and ably governed. Management is effective.

Main school

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Governors have a very good knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school
- The head teacher is very clear about her strategies for school improvement
- The school is organised efficiently and management is very supportive about the welfare of pupils and staff.
- Assessment arrangements are not fully developed so that younger pupils are not always aware of how best to improve their work and staff receive limited analysis of pupils' progress
- Financial management is very thorough.

Commentary

40. The governing body is well organised. Its main committees are very active and have considerable expertise which benefits the school greatly. Governors are well aware of their legal responsibilities and fulfil the great majority of their statutory duties very effectively. However, in two subjects National Curriculum requirements are not fully met (design and technology and ICT), but plans are in hand to strengthen both. Inspectors recognise improvements already made and capacity for further improvement is good. Governors are very supportive of the school and its ethos, and provide appropriate challenge for the headteacher and the senior management team. Respect is high between the governors and the senior management of the school, and they communicate in a frank and open manner. Governors have a very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and use this information in their strategic planning to raise standards. The school is a very harmonious community with a strong commitment to equal opportunities and the inclusion of all pupils. New arrivals and pupils who come from minority ethnic groups are integrated very well into the school. Support for pupils with special educational needs and for those at an early stage of learning English is well led and managed.
41. The headteacher has high aspirations for the school. She embodies the Catholic faith that is at the heart of the school's ethos and is an excellent role model for staff and pupils. Her standing in the local community reflects this. She has a very good grasp of where the school is at present, where she wants it to go, and how to achieve it. The application for Specialist School status exemplifies high aspirations for pupils and how to extend their educational horizons. Among parents and pupils consensus is strong that the school is well led and managed. The headteacher and senior managers work well together and have a strong commitment to the care of pupils. Good emphasis is placed on supporting and developing staff. Targets that stem from discussion are linked effectively to school and personal professional development needs. The school is successful in attracting and retaining well-qualified staff in an area where this is not easy. The heads of departments manage budgets and resources effectively and schemes of work are well planned on the whole. Management of ICT developments, however, is not focused strongly enough on applications across the curriculum: practice is too variable. The school's results are regularly reviewed both overall and in departments. Appropriate action is taken to improve performance, for example, in modern foreign languages the choice of language for GCSE has been moved forward to the beginning of Year 9. However, the procedures for assessing and setting targets in Years 7 to 9 are not sufficiently developed. These need a sharper focus so that pupils and parents have a clearer picture of where pupils are, and how best to improve their work.
42. Overall improvement of the school since the last inspection is satisfactory. It has maintained its strong ethos, very good leadership and well above average results. Both the main school and the sixth form remain highly popular. Some progress has been made in the key issues of the last report but more remains to be done. The timing of the school day has been adjusted so this is no longer a problem in the main school, although poor punctuality is a weakness in the sixth form. Better systems are in place for monitoring teaching and support the good arrangements for the professional development of teachers: teaching is better now and more consistently good throughout. While good improvements have been made in ICT, National Curriculum requirements are still not met in full in design and technology. The school has developed well as a Beacon school and looks forward to specialist school status in science. The capacity for further improvement is good.
43. The school's finance manager looks after the long-term and day-to-day finances very well. The school has a very good understanding of how to gain the best value from the decisions they make. There is a clear link between the intended expenditure and the educational priority of raising standards. Funding for Beacon status supports very effectively specialist areas. The governors take a very responsible view of their role in financial planning and monitor expenditure thoroughly. Reserves are prudent to support the school's plans. Taking into

consideration the standards achieved, the quality of teaching, its ethos, and the leadership and management, the school provides good value for money.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	4,674,367	Balance from previous year	229,219
Total expenditure	4,594,430	Balance carried forward to the next	79,937
Expenditure per pupil	3,940		

Sixth form

Strategic planning is a strength. Management is effective in most respects. Governors helpfully maintain oversight of provision.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership and overall planning are very good
- Arrangements work well on a day-to-day basis
- Lack of a suitable monitoring system for attendance limits the effectiveness of provision

Commentary

44. The success of the long-established consortium is due to visionary leadership, strong commitment by the four participant schools and effective overall planning. Senior managers and co-ordinators meet weekly to synchronise developments. Performance is regularly reviewed but accountability is blurred because of student mobility within the consortium. The development plan is well focused on important issues; common quality assurance systems are to be established across the sixth form, in line with developments in Camden. Although the consortium is not a separate legal entity, governors' representatives of the schools convene informally to maintain an oversight and several governors make specialist contributions. The governing body is well informed about the consortium, aware of its strengths and weaknesses but does not challenge results as carefully as in the main school.
45. On a day-to-day basis curricular and teaching arrangements work well. A strength is that if a teaching group is vulnerable, for example, because of low student numbers or shortage of teachers, alternative arrangements can be made within the four schools. A weakness of management is the inability to account on a daily basis for the attendance of sixth form students. While it is possible to track individual students through the registers of subject teachers no system is in place for routine daily monitoring. This is significant because the high level of absence is detracting from students' progress and thus from the performance of individuals and the school as a whole.
46. Many features of leadership and management in the sixth form are the same as those in the main school. Students benefit from the strongly positive and caring ethos. Well-managed and effective support for those with special educational or language needs is provided. Financial management is prudent. Expenditure matches income and effective arrangements allow for joint commitment of resources on important matters including co-ordination and staffing. Bearing in mind the results students achieve and their participation, the course offer, quality of teaching and overall co-ordination, the cost-effectiveness is satisfactory.

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

- Standards in English are well above the national average by the end of Years 9 and 11
- The achievement of pupils is very good throughout the school
- Very good teaching, particularly in Years 9, 10 and 11, helps pupils to do very well in tests and examinations
- The English department is very well led and managed
- Not enough teaching rooms are allocated to specialist English teaching.

Commentary

47. Standards in Years 7 to 9 are well above the national average and the achievement of pupils is very good. Results in the National Curriculum tests in 2003 were well above the national average and well above average compared with pupils of similar prior attainment. Results at this stage are consistently much better than those for girls nationally. The achievement of girls who entered the school with relatively low standards of English was particularly good in 2003. This is due mainly to careful assessment of pupils' needs and well-focused specialist teaching. Pupils read well from a wide range of texts and show particularly good skills in interpreting poems and writing about them. Writing for different purposes develops very well.
48. Standards in English are well above the national average by the end of Year 11. Achievement is very good. Examination results in both English and English literature were significantly above levels reached by girls nationally in 2003. Achievement was strongest by higher attaining pupils in English literature in 2003 with almost a third of pupils gaining A* or A grade passes, which is an improvement on results in 2002. The quality of reading and discussion work is high because teaching is planned well to challenge all pupils and they are well-motivated to succeed. Writing skills develop well in Year 11. Good examples were seen of fluent, well-expressed and accurate writing based both on personal experiences and also in response to poems, plays and novels they had read and some was of high quality.
49. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers' subject expertise and their commitment to teaching are strong. As a result lessons are planned very well and engage pupils actively in a range of reading, speaking, discussion and writing activities. Teachers are particularly successful in adjusting learning activities to the needs of particular pupils, including the gifted and talented, the less able and those with special educational needs. Lessons were particularly well planned to maximise the progress of language development for the relatively few pupils who had arrived at the school with below average skills in English, both those with special educational needs and some at an early stage of learning English. The teachers are successful in helping pupils to achieve very well in tests and examinations because they have strong expertise in teaching to the examination criteria and they encourage pupils to have positive attitudes towards their learning.

Example of outstanding practice

Outstanding monitoring of pupils' progress, Y11 English

Excellent monitoring of the progress of individuals is an outstanding feature of English. Using this information the teacher involved pupils at appropriate levels, in an exceptionally well-structured Year 11 lesson in which pupils analysed the language used in non-fiction writing. Additional support for the pupil beginning to learn English

enabled her to progress very well, in line with the rest.

50. Curricular leadership and departmental management are very good so that the considerable expertise of the teaching team is used effectively. Good progress has been made in using ICT within the curriculum. Team teaching by two very skilled teachers with pupils having a range of special educational and language needs in Year 7 is a successful innovation. It helps to build pupils' confidence and raise their language skills within the same curriculum taught to all Year 7 pupils. High results have been maintained since the last inspection and teaching is better. Overall improvement since the last inspection is good. Teaching within the department is hindered by an inadequate allocation of specialist teaching rooms. This causes considerable inconvenience to teachers, restriction on what can be taught to certain classes and loss of time. Of the eight teachers observed, three teach in ten or more different rooms each week and three in more than six different rooms. Teachers made every effort to minimise the effects of what is unsatisfactory accommodation.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

51. Standards of both literacy and oracy are good throughout the school. The school has taken effective steps to identify and help pupils who arrive with below average standards of literacy to improve their basic skills. Similarly, the English department has focused on Year 9 pupils in order to raise their reading and writing standards. As a result, pupils achieve very well in Year 9 tests. The proportion reaching the average standard (Level 5) in 2003 was in the top five per cent of all schools nationally compared with pupils of similar prior attainment. The paired reading activities in which Year 12 students hear pupils in Year 7 read at two lunchtime sessions each week help the younger pupils to improve their skills. The school's literacy policy initiatives started in 2001 have helped to develop an awareness of the importance of literacy throughout the curriculum. Particular strengths in developing literacy and oral work were seen in art, drama and history. Teachers showed good awareness of the need to emphasise new vocabulary in modern foreign languages, mathematics, religious education and geography. Many subject teachers use language guides and writing frames to help to develop confidence in the writing of reports and essays.

Modern foreign languages

Provision in modern foreign languages, French, German and Spanish is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching helps pupils to achieve well
- Pupils learn to use a comprehensive range of grammatical constructions and tenses
- Teachers make very good use of resources
- Some lessons do not have enough challenge to develop pupils' speaking
- The department has no foreign language assistant

Commentary

52. French is the school's first modern foreign language, which pupils study in Year 7. In Year 8, most pupils study German or Spanish as a second language. At the end of the year, pupils choose one of the three languages to study in Year 9, and they continue with it until GCSE. Turnover of staff has been high over the last four years: only one of the seven teachers was present at the last inspection in 2000, and leadership of the department has changed three times. French has been the language most seriously affected by these changes. The present head of department has been in post for just under two terms. She has brought a sense of purpose and educational direction: her leadership is good. She has worked very hard to organise the department, and has made a very satisfactory start in strengthening standards and teaching. Resources have improved, but up-to-date readers are required, and a new course book for Year 7. Each language has at least one native speaker, but not all pupils have

contact with a native speaker, for example, a foreign language assistant. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

53. Teaching is good. Teachers have effective knowledge of their subjects, several are native speakers and nearly all speak two languages. They use the foreign language well in most lessons. Lessons start formally, and objectives are shared, so that pupils know what they have to learn. Teachers plan their lessons well, with different activities and skills that engage pupils' interest. In many lessons, pupils work productively and at a good pace. They are keen to learn, and enjoy writing. Sometimes, however, pupils are not challenged enough to develop their speaking and increase their confidence by reading aloud or by taking a more active part in the lesson. Teachers use resources very well, particularly worksheets which complement the lesson. Homework is set regularly and marked. Not all pupils, however, respond positively to teachers' marking by completing corrections to improve the accuracy of their work. Work is well matched to pupils' needs. Relationships are good.

French

54. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2003 indicate that pupils' overall level of attainment is a little above average. GCSE results in 2003 in French at the higher grades (A*-C) were below the average for girls and showed a decline from the results in 2002. Many pupils under-achieved in the speaking element of the examination.
55. Pupils' overall level of attainment in Years 7 to 11 is in line with expectations for their age; pupils are achieving well and making up ground lost during staff changes. Pupils with special educational needs achieve in line with the rest, and gifted and talented pupils generally make stronger progress. Over time, pupils acquire a very wide range of topic vocabulary, and use relevant grammatical constructions and tenses. Teachers introduce these in a thorough and systematic way. This enables pupils to extract information successfully from conversations heard on cassette and to link up French phrases and sentences with their English equivalents. Their written work is a strength. By Year 9, all pupils have a sound knowledge of the present tense of high frequency verbs, and many pupils know the perfect and future tenses. Regular practice in Year 10 ensures that by Year 11 pupils use three tenses to write about work experience and holidays. Higher-attaining pupils write accurately: average and lower-attaining pupils are less consistently accurate. Pupils' books are well presented and in many cases well illustrated. They take a pride in their work. Pupils' speaking skills vary. Lower-attaining pupils in Year 8 all spoke a sentence in French to answer the register with good pronunciation, and they learned how to stress the feminine form of the adjective in statements such as *ma soeur est grande*. In contrast, lower-attaining pupils in Year 9 lacked confidence and pronunciation was not always accurate. Occasionally, opportunities for pupils to ask and answer questions were lost because the teachers did too much themselves. Pupils are being prepared well for the oral examination in GCSE: worksheets with answers written by the pupils are being used effectively.

German

56. GCSE results in 2003 in German at the higher grades (A*-C) were above average for girls nationally and showed an improvement from the results in 2002. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' overall level of attainment in Years 7 to 9 was average, and in Years 10 and 11 above average; pupils achieve well, including those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented. As in French, pupils acquire a very wide range of topic vocabulary, and use relevant grammatical constructions and tenses because teachers introduce these in a thorough and systematic way. Pupils listen well; they extract information successfully from conversations heard on cassette, and link up phrases and sentences. Their written work is a strength. By Year 9, all pupils have a sound knowledge of the present tense of frequently used verbs, and many pupils use the perfect tense when writing about leisure activities and transport. By Year 11, higher-attaining pupils use inversion and subordinate clauses very well. Worksheets are used effectively to prepare pupils for the oral examination. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils read aloud sentences with good pronunciation and correctly identified whether

the sentences that they heard related to present, past or future events. Pupils in Year 10, which has a much wider range of attainment, were not such accurate speakers, but they showed a good understanding of topic vocabulary.

Spanish

57. GCSE results in 2003 in Spanish at the higher grades (A*-C) were above average for girls nationally and showed an improvement from the results in 2002. In work seen during the inspection, pupils' overall level of attainment in Years 7 to 9 was average, and in Years 10 and 11 above average. All pupils, including those with special educational needs and the gifted and talented achieve well. As in French and German, pupils systematically acquire a very wide range of topic vocabulary and relevant grammatical constructions and tenses, because they are well taught. They listen well and can extract information successfully from conversations heard on cassette. This enables them to link up phrases and sentences. Their written work is a strength. By Year 9, pupils have satisfactory knowledge of the present tense of frequently used verbs, and they are familiar with reflexive verbs in writing about their daily routine. By Year 11, pupils write at length, using three different tenses, together with adverbs which are designed to trigger the correct tense. As in French and German, well-planned worksheets are used well to prepare pupils for the oral examination. They are reasonably confident speakers and have good pronunciation.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve highly in GCSE examinations
- Teaching and learning are good with some very good features; all work hard and have respect for each other
- Schemes of work, although being reviewed, are not yet complete and lack guidance on work for the highest attaining pupils
- Little use is made of short-term targets to help pupils assess their own progress

Commentary

58. Year 9 results, in 2003, while above the national average were not quite as good as in 2002 when they were well above average, because more gained higher levels (Level 6 and above). Pupils perform less well in mathematics than in science and English. GCSE results, both in 2002 and in 2003, were well above the national averages, both for all schools and for girls: achievement is high. All pupils gained a pass grade in 2003. Pupils' work is tested regularly which helps to reinforce learning; results reflect the benefit of this for pupils of all backgrounds.
59. Standards in Years 7 to 9 during the inspection were average. Pupils enter the school with average attainment. The work in their books indicates that the more able pupils are not always well challenged, as reflected by the omission of higher level of work in the schemes of work. However, teachers' planning is now taking more account of the need to provide greater challenge for the more able pupils to improve their levels of attainment by the end of Year 9. Overall, achievement across Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory for pupils of all abilities. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 prepare for the GCSE examination. By the end of Year 11 overall attainment is high. Pupils from the highest sets make very good progress. Pupils from the lowest sets are prepared for the GCSE foundation tier. Their progress, including pupils with special educational needs, is good; teaching groups are small and teachers support the pupils well. Units of work devised by teachers help pupils to take responsibility for their own learning. Basic calculation work is sound and they use graphs competently. All pupils follow coursework assignments. These are of high quality and computers are used to best advantage to ensure a high standard of presentation, including diagrams.

60. Teaching and learning, while satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, is good in Years 10 and 11 and better than at the last inspection, when unsatisfactory teaching was observed. Teachers have very good subject knowledge which enables them to plan and structure lessons well. They pose questions to encourage pupils to participate confidently and also give clear explanations to help pupils understand. Too often, in both Years 7 and 8, teachers do not take enough account of pupils' earlier learning: the pace of the lesson is too slow and the prepared work too easy for some, which limits their progress. Pupils are keen to learn and show interest in all tasks. Behaviour is exemplary; pupils are always polite and friendly. Relationships are excellent; pupils work well together and independently. Pupils' work is regularly tested but without reference to National Curriculum levels. Class-work is not always marked and few comments are used to advise pupils how to improve. Little use is made of short- term targets to help pupils to assess their own progress, which was reported at the last inspection.
61. The leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Teamwork is good. Teachers have maintained high standards since the last inspection and have the capacity to improve further. Ideas are discussed at regular meetings but there is no systematic review of the performance of all members of the department and hence no established process to share good practice. Schemes of work are being reviewed but are incomplete and so far provide too little help and guidance to teachers on using ICT, on different methods of teaching or more challenging work at higher tier levels. Pupils have opportunities to take part in National Mathematics Challenges as well as attending Master Classes.

Mathematics across the curriculum

62. Standards are good overall. In mathematics, most students demonstrate good number skills, both mentally and in writing. Calculators are used competently for a variety of purposes and discouraged for easy calculations. To help other departments in the promotion of number skills teachers have been attached as consultants to each subject department and a guide produced that identifies strategies for teachers to help improve their pupils' mathematical skills. No systematic monitoring is in place of the use of these strategies and hence no process to review the guide. However, most subjects are using number well. For example, standards are high in science, geography, media studies and business education, where extensive use is made of a variety of calculations as well as graphical representation. In ICT good use is made of formulae when using spreadsheets; measurement, proportion and pattern are used to good effect in art. Standards are satisfactory in design technology where ideas of scale and enlargement are used in drawings. Too few opportunities occur in physical education to enhance students' use of number and measurement.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very good as a result of good teaching and very good pupil attitudes
- Teachers' very good knowledge and understanding promote learning effectively
- Enrichment through the use of visitors and local visits improves interest and learning
- Pupils are not making enough use of ICT in their science lessons
- Opportunities for pupils in Years 8 and 9 to design and carry out investigations need strengthening

Commentary

63. The results in Year 9 national tests in 2003 were well above national averages for all schools and for girls. These figures have been similar for the last three years, are better than at the last inspection and represent satisfactory achievement across Years 7 to 9. Results in

science match those in English and are a little better than in mathematics. Results of tests and teacher assessments are very close; teachers have a good knowledge of their pupils. GCSE results for 2003 were well above the national averages for all schools and for girls and much better than in recent years. While results represent achievement which is a little better than expected from pupils' Year 9 results, there is scope for raising them further: overall, pupils performed a little better in their other subjects than in science.

64. Standards at the end of Year 9 are above average and achievement is good. Knowledge develops well and pupils have good opportunities to understand the reasons for changes they observe in different aspects of science. A commercial scheme which develops a project approach to learning science has been introduced in Year 7 but there is still little opportunity for pupils to design and carry out investigations, which is a statutory requirement. Pupils in Years 8 and 9 mostly learn about science rather than doing science themselves. Standards at the end of Year 11 are above average. Pupils of all backgrounds achieve well. In a Year 10 lesson pupils used burettes confidently, measured accurately and wrote equations using words and formulae: they had made good gains in their learning from Year 9. Similarly, in a Year 11 lesson pupils built well on earlier learning about the movement of molecules in osmosis and took responsibility for planning an experiment to investigate the process.
65. Teaching and learning are good. This is a result of good planning and organisation that provide effective learning opportunities. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of science which are used well to help the pupils to learn. Pupils respond well to the teacher; lessons do not always start promptly but pupils soon settle down. Teachers present work in a lively and enthusiastic manner that readily engages pupils and ensures good learning. Marking is inconsistent. Often, teachers do not let pupils know the standard of their work in terms of National Curriculum levels or what they need to do to improve. Not enough use is made of the Key Stage 3 Science Strategy to further improve standards. Visitors enrich learning; in a Year 9 lesson on the skeleton, a fourth-year medical student responded helpfully to pupils' questions. Very good use is made of numeracy. The emphasis on literacy is satisfactory but relatively little use is made of ICT. Good support is available in most lessons for pupils with special educational needs and those starting to learn English. These pupils make the same progress as others in their classes.
66. Leadership and management are good. Careful analysis of examination and test results has been used to identify areas for improvement. However, the success criteria are not sharp enough and therefore it is not easy to measure progress. The technician support is well organised and managed and makes a strong contribution to learning. The accommodation is adequate but a few rooms are rather cramped. Resources are good but not enough progress has been made in using ICT in lessons, since the last inspection.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Achievement is good overall, the majority of pupils have very positive attitudes and are working up to the limits of their individual capabilities
- Teaching and learning are mostly good, and there is some very good teaching
- Cross-curricular ICT lacks leadership and management
- Since the last inspection resources and schemes of work have improved well
- Not all pupils in Years 10 and 11 have access to their full National Curriculum entitlement
- Assessment is not used well enough in Years 7 to 9 to explain to pupils how well they are doing and how to improve, and recording and reporting in Years 10 and 11 are inadequate

Commentary

67. The school provides separate lessons in ICT for all pupils in Years 7 to 9 (using the ICT Key Stage 3 National Strategy) and for all pupils in Years 10 and 11 (who follow a key skills Level 2 programme). Courses in Years 10 and 11 do not fully meet National Curriculum requirements, because opportunities to use ICT for controlling and automating events, and the depth and breadth of study, are insufficient. For example, there are too few opportunities to study data protection, computer law issues, and the place of the computer in society. Standards of work seen represent good achievement in all years because work is planned to interest and challenge pupils of different abilities and backgrounds. They extend their skills and understanding progressively. Standards are in line with national expectations by the end of Year 9. The department does not offer GCSE. Work seen in the areas covered in key skills indicates that standards are average in the topics studied by the end of Year 11.
68. Teaching and learning are good overall and there is some very good teaching. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, they plan and present the subject with enthusiasm, and very good use is made of new electronic resources, such as digital projectors. The ICT Key Stage 3 strategy provides a very good basis for lesson plans, but few links are made with other subjects. In the best lessons, there is good class management, with varied activities and a combination of whole class and individual tuition. Questioning is used well in the best lessons to gauge understanding. In other lessons greater use of evaluative summary sessions, with more pupil participation, would aid learning and retention. Generally there is little use of self-assessment. Marking is not adequately linked to National Curriculum levels or sufficiently explained to pupils. The vast majority of pupils have positive attitudes to the subject and tasks set. The subject makes a good contribution to their personal development through themes for projects, Internet research and ICT-related work experience. Behaviour is normally very good. In a minority of lessons a small number of pupils are not always attentive when teachers are talking.
69. Leadership and management of the department are satisfactory. Good improvements have been made since the last inspection. Separate ICT lessons for all pupils are now provided and this is beginning to improve standards in other curricular areas, but plans lack rigour and cross-curricular plans are not guided and implemented by a co-ordinator or steering committee. However, they include the possibility of offering a GCSE short course for all pupils.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

70. The provision of ICT across the curriculum was seriously criticised in the last inspection report. Although the school has worked hard to address the issues identified, and has greatly improved resources and schemes of work, the quality of cross-curricular ICT is still too variable. In some subjects, art and music for example, the use of ICT is very good, but it is not satisfactory in science and mathematics. Design and technology is not making regular use of computer-aided design or manufacture. Standards and the use of ICT are just satisfactory in other subjects. Further specialist resources are needed, for example, for control technology, and some teachers still find access to computer rooms difficult. However, in most subjects pupils use computers to research and to present work in a variety of ways. Other skills, for example, system design, data handling and the use of electronic control are infrequently used. The use of ICT across subjects is not monitored, and pupils' attainment in Years 10 and 11 is not adequately assessed, recorded or reported.

HUMANITIES

Both geography and history were inspected and work in sociology, provided as a GCSE option subject, was sampled. In the Year 11 sociology lessons seen, teaching was very good, enabling pupils to understand the ways in which pressure groups can influence government social policies. Project work showed a high level of interest and very good independent research by pupils. GCSE results are well above average.

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well in Years 7 to 9, with results well above those expected for their age
- Pupils respond with enthusiasm to very good and challenging teaching
- Fieldwork and coursework contribute well to pupils' good achievement at the end of Year 11
- Very good opportunities are provided for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The use of ICT is not fully integrated into all schemes of work

Commentary

71. In 2003, in Year 9 teacher assessments pupils' results were well above those expected for their age and more reached the higher levels than in the previous year. At GCSE in 2003, pupils' results were a little better than the overall national average and in line with those for girls' schools. Results in 2003 were not as high as in preceding years. The reasons for the dip (staff absence which caused discontinuity in teaching) are now resolved.
72. The attainment of pupils on entry is average; they do not have well developed map skills. Their achievement by the end of Year 9 is very good. They learn to use technical vocabulary well and have developed good knowledge of settlement patterns. They understand the influence of the physical environment on rural ways of life and how and why this is changing. Projects such as the Fair Trade day develop very good links with citizenship. Achievement in Year 11 is good and standards are above the national average. Pupils have learned to apply models of urban structure and can analyse the differences between more and less developed countries. Their coastal coursework is very good. Pupils of all backgrounds and abilities achieve well. High attaining pupils are given challenging tasks for homework. Their personal and extended writing is particularly good. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well as a result of the individual attention they receive in very well behaved classes.
73. Teaching overall is very good, with particularly good teaching in Years 7 to 9, enabling pupils to learn rapidly. In all years pupils benefit from teachers who have very good subject knowledge and plan very well-structured lessons with varied activities and resources. Pupils are interested in the subject, work well in groups and respond to the pace of learning set by their teachers. Lessons start briskly with recall activities and questioning techniques are well used to encourage discussion. Not enough time is given to the conclusion of lessons. Homework is well used to extend learning. Assessment is effective in setting targets for improvement and in tracking pupils' progress. The use of self- and peer assessment in Years 7 to 9 is good. Pupils develop good literacy skills through the use of key words and many opportunities for discussion. Good teaching of numeracy skills results in the accurate use of graphs and statistics. The use of ICT and Internet research are not yet integrated into all units of work. Pupils' skilled extraction of evidence from world-wide case studies contributes effectively to their cultural and moral development. The programme of local and residential fieldwork is successful in developing individual research techniques.
74. Leadership is good. There is a clear vision and plan for restoring the high profile of geography in the school, following staffing changes which affected the popularity of the subject and a decline in 2003 of the previous very high standards. Standards indicate that the department is regaining ground strongly. Both new and experienced staff work very well as a team. The routine management is efficient and display work is good.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are well above average and attainment is above average in Years 9 and 11
- Very good teaching and learning lead to very good achievement
- Leadership and management are very good despite difficulties of scattered accommodation
- Assessment is good overall but inconsistent practices in Years 7 to 9 mean that pupils are not always sure of how to improve their progress
- Curricular enrichment is very strong but not enough use is made of the local environment as a teaching resource

Commentary

75. In 2003 GCSE results were well above the national average for girls, and in line with the results of other subjects in the school. Results have been consistently high for the past three years. Standards of work seen during the inspection were above average. High attaining Year 11 pupils have drafted some very good coursework and work in class shows an ability to assess and interpret historical sources and draw appropriate conclusions. The work of some lower attaining pupils is less analytical and their standard is average. Overall these standards represent very good achievement.
76. Standards in Year 9 are above average and achievement is very good from average standards when pupils come into the school. Year 9 pupils have produced some effective work about life in Nazi Germany in the 1930's, learning through discussion and developing their thinking skills as well as their understanding. The standard of literacy is high, enhanced by the way speaking and writing skills are an integral part of all lessons. Numeracy is well used when appropriate information, for example, relating to population changes, is represented as graphs. Opportunities to use ICT are planned but practice is irregular because access to resources is inconsistent. Pupils with special educational needs and those who are starting to learn English are known to teachers and supported well according to their individual level of difficulty. High-attaining pupils are regularly given extra activities to challenge them. The achievement of all these groups is very good.
77. Teaching and learning are very good. Pupils clearly enjoy their lessons. Very good planning and organisation allow pupils to participate actively in their own learning, including evaluating their own progress. Group and pair work develops social and speaking skills. Moral and spiritual themes are successfully tackled through work on such topics as the Bloody Sunday massacre in Northern Ireland. Work is regularly assessed, although inconsistent practices in Years 7 to 9 make it difficult for pupils to relate their grades to National Curriculum levels.
78. Very good management ensures a well-balanced curriculum, although at present there is not enough regular use of the local environment as a historical source. The newly-appointed head of department has already established a cohesive and enthusiastic team, bringing to an end a recent period of staffing instability. However, her work is made difficult because accommodation is scattered around the school so that resources are dissipated and energy needlessly wasted in walking around the site. Although the subject was not reported on in the last short inspection, it is clear that the new staffing appointments constitute a satisfactory improvement and the department is well placed to become even stronger in the future.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are high at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE
- Curricular planning is unsatisfactory because not enough account is taken of the National Curriculum, the use of ICT and the continuity of pupils' progress
- Higher attaining pupils are not challenged enough in some aspects of work
- Staff are well qualified and have very good subject knowledge
- The department is generally well resourced, except for ICT, which is not used effectively enough

Commentary

79. Results in the 2003 GCSE examinations were well above those for all schools nationally, and for girls. The results were almost as high as in previous years. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were also well above average, in a limited range of skills and knowledge.
80. At the end of Year 9, standards in lessons are in line with national expectations. The quality of work is better in textiles, where activities are more open-ended with scope for development, than in food studies and resistant materials. Pupils coming into the school have very varied experience of the subject, many having done little, so pupils' achievement by Year 9 is good. For example, in a food studies lesson on high fibre foods pupils used a range of tools and materials with precision and checked their work as they progressed. In resistant materials, however, a relatively simple task was not challenging enough for more able pupils. Standards of work in Years 10 and 11 are above average. Pupils are being prepared well for examinations. High quality GCSE coursework in all material areas shows that pupils have worked hard and applied their earlier learning effectively: achievement is good. Pupils with special educational needs have been supported to do well and their work is good. No differences were noticed in the standards of pupils of different ethnic groups.
81. Teaching and learning are satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and good in Years 10 and 11. Where good teaching was seen, teachers used imaginative methods and pupils were encouraged to do more individual work: in consequence their work showed greater flair and imagination. This was evident in textiles in Year 11 where pupils were designing and making a variety of garments: their design and drawing skills in textiles were very good. In graphics, pupils produced a wide range of high quality products based on the theme of restaurants. In contrast teaching in other areas used limited approaches and creativity was inhibited. Existing schemes of work are unsatisfactory and need updating. Although ICT is used well in textiles (for designing and making) it is not used enough in food technology and resistant materials. Not enough emphasis is placed on electronics and the technology of the 21st century and there is no provision for computer control. Curricular arrangements across Years 7 to 9 do not provide consistent experience across different aspects of technology. This is due in part to shortage of staff (in resistant materials) and results in uneven development of pupils' knowledge and skills, and is unsatisfactory. Technician support is inadequate.
82. Overall management of the department is just satisfactory. Leadership is good in several respects. The present head of department has done considerable work to move the department forward. Curricular plans include work for pupils of different abilities and the development of literacy and numeracy. However, lack of collaboration among teachers is inhibiting progress in implementing the full National Curriculum. Systems for assessing pupils' work are good but marking is very variable, often without helpful comments. Not enough use is

made of ICT. The last report commented on deficiencies in the design and technology curriculum, particularly in respect of electronics, which is still unsatisfactory. The teaching of electronics in science does not compensate satisfactorily.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well in Years 10 and 11; GCSE results are well above average
- Pupils have very good opportunities to work in a wide range of media
- Pupils use their sketch books well to develop ideas and independence
- Very good leadership and management are effective in raising achievement
- Accommodation for large scale work and storage is cramped

Commentary

83. In 2003, pupils' attainment at the end of Year 9 was just below the national expectation, although a significant proportion reached higher levels. GCSE results are consistently well above the national averages for all schools and for girls. Pupils of all backgrounds achieve very well.
84. Pupils enter the school in Year 7 with widely different experiences in art and, for a good proportion, previous experience is limited. Their achievement from Years 7 to 9 is good and standards reached in Year 9 are average. Pupils develop good skills because of regular emphasis on observational drawing. They understand how to use colour effectively in paint, print and collage. They use clay and other materials to extend their ideas in three dimensions. In their homework, pupils make good use of their sketch books for research and planning. By Year 11, standards are well above average. Pupils are highly motivated. They achieve very well because they spend much of their own time building up their portfolios and sketch books, some of which are outstanding. Guided very well by their teachers, pupils use the skills they have learned earlier to experiment with ideas in a range of media and on different scales. Higher attaining pupils have the confidence to take risks and their work is imaginative and individual. All pupils develop a good visual vocabulary with which to talk about their work but not all keep a sufficient, evaluative written record. Pupils know their own ideas are valued and respect teachers' guidance. Those with special talents have every encouragement to extend their work. Older pupils have opportunity to visit galleries and exhibitions and enjoy art activities beyond the classroom. Much reference is made to the work of artists and other cultures which gives a rich dimension to pupils' work. Pupils reflect on and explore issues of spirituality and this contributes very well to their personal development.
85. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers' very good subject knowledge and skills promote high expectations and result in good and often very good learning. Lessons are well organised and taught so that pupils work to their individual strengths. Teachers give very clear one-to-one feedback to pupils in lessons and all work is thoroughly marked so that pupils know how well they are doing. Procedures are in place to enable pupils to engage more formally in assessing their own work. Teachers give their time generously to support pupils, particularly those in Years 10 and 11 who demonstrate high levels of commitment. Pupils have opportunities to work with high quality materials but lack of space to work on a large scale and storage of work are constraints on what pupils can do.
86. The department is ambitious and dedicated to raising standards. Its leadership is a strength. It is enthusiastic, reflective and self-critical with a clear vision for the future. It is inventive in using resources, including ICT. Management is very effective, recognising and sharing good

practice amongst the hard working team of teachers and making good use of helpful technical support. Detailed schemes of work are used to structure pupils' work and map their progress whilst allowing flexibility to teachers to choose activities and work to their strengths. Assessment data are well used to monitor and raise achievement. Since the last inspection, standards have been consistently very good, strengths have been maintained and the department continues to make a significant contribution to the creative life of the school.

Drama

Provision in drama in Years 10 and 11 is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching helps pupils to achieve well above average examination results
- Pupils are well motivated and enthusiastic
- The lack of a dedicated drama space constrains development of the subject

Commentary

87. In the GCSE examinations of 2002 and 2003 results were well above the national averages, both for all schools and for girls, as they have been for a number of years. All pupils passed and the proportion of the highest grades (A*, A) was well above average.
88. In Years 7 to 9, drama is included in at least one of the English units of study. Each year group benefits from professional workshops performed in school and related to the unit. Not all classes have specialist drama teaching. In the one Year 8 lesson sampled, attainment was above expectations. Pupils understand technical terms, and can devise and sustain a role. They vary their language effectively to match their character. The classroom was too small to allow much development of movement despite the very good behaviour of the pupils. At the end of Year 11, standards are well above national expectations; pupils have made substantial progress on the GCSE course and they achieve very well. They work very well together, constantly evaluating and adjusting their work, as in a Year 11 lesson when pupils devised a short presentation on the theme of *Animals and Man*. They took decisions as a group, chose a story, worked out movements and could justify their ideas and what they had learned from the activity, designed to explore the relationship of humanity to man. Their knowledge of technical terms and concepts deepens on the course and they use them critically. Their written work shows very good understanding and strong response to the texts studied.
89. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have excellent command of the subject. Objectives for each lesson are very clear and conveyed progressively with each activity. When discussing pupils' performances, teachers often continue in role, so extending learning further. By frequently working in groups, pupils learn to make decisions and assess their work themselves. This fosters independent learning well. Pupils of all abilities and backgrounds are well supported in lessons and make similar very good progress.
90. The department is well led and managed. The head of department has a clear vision of the place of drama in Years 10 and 11. The school is aware that further development of the subject in Years 7 to 9 would support and extend the English curriculum but is limited by the lack of an appropriate discrete drama room. Available alternatives are not satisfactory. The gymnasium is sometimes used but acoustics are poor. The hall has a good stage and equipment but is used for several purposes. No reference was made to drama in the last short inspection report. Drama has consolidated its strength in the school through maintaining very good teaching and learning, results which are well above average and a regular programme of school productions; improvement is good.

Music

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The combination of a strong, stable teaching team, excellent leadership and very good resources promotes high levels of achievement in music
- Unusually large numbers of pupils enjoy active music-making in a rich variety of activities
- The quality of some choirs and ensembles is excellent; levels of artistry are high

Commentary

91. On entry to the school, the experience of pupils in music and their respective attainment levels are variable. While 10 per cent are selected on the basis of their interest in music others have had very little experience. As a result of consistently very good teaching, all pupils receive a firm grounding in basic musical understanding and performance, and their achievement through Years 7 to 9 is very good. By the end of Year 9, their overall attainment in class is above average and their choral singing is excellent. They have a good understanding of the ingredients of music, the organisation of sound and of musical style. They are highly enthusiastic about music and many - more than twice as many as nationally - opt for GCSE. This very good achievement continues in Years 10 and 11 and is reflected in the GCSE results, which are consistently well above the national averages for all schools and for girls. In 2003, almost 40 per cent achieved the highest (A*, A) grades. Results for instrumental practical examinations are good across the school. In the past three years all 136 candidates have passed with good proportions gaining distinctions or a pass at a higher grade, and a few have gained the very highest grade. The department's excellent extended curriculum involves all pupils in Years 7 to 9 and large numbers in Years 10 and 11. A very high proportion of pupils - around 30 per cent - take instrumental lessons at the school. Pupils of all backgrounds achieve very well.
92. Pupils in all years look forward to their music lessons and rehearsals. They enjoy the very good and sometimes excellent teaching and they learn fast because teachers exude and transmit their musicianship, making the subject accessible. Pupils respond wholeheartedly, often with delight, to this natural artistry and to teachers' adept use of music to engage, motivate and communicate.
93. The director of music provides excellent, inspirational leadership. His clear vision of an extended and enriched music curriculum, offering all pupils enjoyment and challenge and making a strong contribution to their personal development, has a positive effect across and beyond the school community. The vision is achieved through good management and efficient organisation of a large department involving 30 teachers, 15 ensembles and choirs, regular concerts (12 last year), impressive resources and a range of enrichment activities in the local community. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Some of the many improvements include revision and extension of the curriculum, Beacon school activities involving the sharing of good practice with other schools, substantial development of ICT, a composer-in-residence and a new and popular Gospel Choir.

Example of outstanding practice

Excellent start to Year 7 composition lesson

A Year 7 composition lesson began with a ten minute improvised call and response warm-up as the teacher, herself a composer, led girls through a series of increasingly complex musical phrases with movement, culminating in an accurately and vividly performed four-part improvisation. The teacher's warm, dynamic and energetic approach enthused pupils, who concentrated hard with intense enjoyment. After this activity pupils moved into small groups to develop the warm-up material for their compositions, which were later presented to the whole class.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are consistently high and are supported well by very good teaching
- Standards in lessons and in the extra-curricular programme are above average
- The teachers provide a challenging and caring environment that contributes positively to the pupils' personal development

Commentary

94. Standards of pupils in Year 9 are above average. They make good progress in lessons and achieve very well. Their knowledge of how to develop skills and their ability to use evaluations help them to improve of their work. In gymnastics and dance they create sequences that use different height and speed and are exciting to watch. They have good ball skills in netball and are able to apply advanced tactics in games. Overall, standards of pupils in Year 11 are above average, including their knowledge of health-related fitness factors. Their positive attitudes lead to very good achievement. Their trampolining skills are above average. They have good body tension when in the air and are very aware of safety requirements. A small minority of pupils have satisfactory ball skills but are not confident enough in games such as basketball to transfer newly-learned skills into the full game. In all years pupils from minority ethnic groups achieve as well as others. Pupils with special educational needs also achieve as well as others because tasks are designed to meet their educational needs.
95. In 2003, GCSE results were well above the national average, both overall and for girls. Pupils who follow the GCSE course reach very high standards and achieve very well. They have very good depth of knowledge, particularly in anatomy, and apply theories accurately taking good account of other factors. Their notes are a very good resource for revision and often show added independent research. Satisfactory use is made of ICT. Pupils' practical work is above average. They apply advanced skills and tactics in a variety of games. The good extra-curricular programme provides pupils with an interesting range of activities, such as street dance, in addition to traditional games. Individuals and teams enjoy success at local, county and national levels and also in inter-house matches at school. Visiting dance groups enable pupils to study dances from different cultures. Gifted and talented pupils achieve very well as a result of this well planned programme.
96. Teaching and its impact on learning are very good. The teachers create an effective learning environment through high levels of challenge and high expectations of work-rate. Question and answer sessions promote very good development of pupils' technical vocabulary and understanding of broader aspects, such as health-related fitness. The use of number is developed satisfactorily. Homework is well used to extend learning. Assessment is used effectively to highlight areas of development for individuals. Targets are reviewed regularly and the support given leads to improvement. More accurate assessment of attainment on entry would better enable teachers to track pupils' progress. Teachers have very good knowledge of the activities they teach and use demonstration effectively to highlight good performance. Pupils who are unable to take part in lessons are given tasks to involve them closely in what is being taught.
97. Excellent leadership and management have positive impact on standards. Vision and direction are very clear and there is a good team spirit, with enthusiasm and energy which is infectious for both teachers and students. Very good departmental planning ensures that all initiatives are closely linked to improvement of the curriculum and teaching which in turn helps to raise standards. The use of Beacon funding has resulted in excellent links with many local primary schools and in the development of teaching examination lessons in other local secondary

schools. The subject was not reported on in the last inspection. The department has maintained its strengths, is innovative and well placed to improve further.

Example of outstanding practice

Linking of theory and practice leads to very good learning, as in Year 11

A highly effective Year 11 GCSE lesson on motivation set the scene for the topic by rewarding pupils for correct answers! Well designed worksheets supported the lesson which included a very good range of tasks which stimulated a variety of responses - debate, questions and consensus. Pupils drew on their own practical experiences and all made very good gains in knowledge and understanding.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Business studies

98. Business studies, provided as a GCSE option subject, was sampled. The lesson seen was very well taught and the quality of pupils' work well above average in quantity and quality, reflecting the recent high examination results. Students' marketing projects are very competent and make effective use of ICT.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education (PSHE) is taught as a separate subject in all years. Lessons were sampled during the inspection and contributed substantially to the report on citizenship.

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The introduction of the subject has been well planned
- Visitors to the school enrich the curriculum
- The planning in most subjects identifies opportunities to promote citizenship
- Pupils feel that this is a valuable and relevant subject
- Although most teachers inform pupils when lessons have a contribution to make to citizenship, this good practice is not consistent.

Commentary

99. Pupils in Years 9 and 11 reach good standards. They understand the rights and responsibilities of living in a democratic society. This is clear from the way that they put forward opinions about politics and topics such as Fair Trade. Many pupils are well informed and argue in a reasoned and mature way. Pupils achieve well throughout. There are no separate citizenship lessons. There has been good planning to ensure coverage of the different areas that the National Curriculum prescribes through work done in other subjects.
100. Teaching and learning are good, and in some lessons better than this. A very good lesson on political parties and pressure groups led to an interesting discussion. Pupils developed and modified their views through listening to each other, as well as to the teacher. Visitors to the school such as members of parliament and representatives of charities, for example, Oxfam and CAFOD, enrich the curriculum, as do the visits that pupils make as part of their citizenship programme. In a recent theme day on Fair Trade, staff from the local Starbucks worked with pupils in Year 7, explaining how Fair Trade policies improve the life-chances of citizens of the developing world. Pupils of all backgrounds and year groups value the subject and the opportunities it gives to develop their understanding of how - among other things - democracy works. Pupils put forward very mature views on the desirability of creating a national DNA-database and were very clear about the advantages and disadvantages of this.

101. The subject is well managed by the head of religious education. She has drawn up a well-planned course to cover all the requirements of the National Curriculum. Personal, social and health education lessons and regular tutor sessions cover much of the content. However, very good use is made of opportunities in other subjects to teach elements of citizenship. Teachers of sociology, geography, science and history all taught elements of the syllabus during the inspection. The school has made good progress in developing a system of assessing and reporting how well pupils achieve in the subject. The resources for the subject are good, and enable it to be taught effectively.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 14 subjects and courses were inspected at La Sainte Union 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 2003.

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	6	83	80	17	24	30	30
Biology	13	46	65	0	11	12	21
Chemistry	5	80	73	0	14	22	24
Classical studies	3	33	87	0	34	10	35
Drama	1	100	87	100	20	50	31
Economics	5	40	74	0	20	16	26
English literature	5	80	86	20	19	28	30
French	5	40	78	0	19	10	27
Design and technology	4	85	75	0	15	25	25
Geography	2	50	74	0	20	15	27
German	1	100	82	0	19	30	29
History	16	75	81	6	20	21	29
Information and communication technology	2	50	67	0	11	15	21
Mathematics	1	100	62	0	17	40	22
Media studies	3	100	86	0	24	37	32
Music	1	100	87	0	21	20	31
Other social studies	14	64	70	29	17	26	24
Physics	3	100	69	0	14	33	23
Sociology	13	54	72	8	18	16	25
Spanish	1	100	79	0	18	30	27
Physical education	1	100	73	100	11	60	23

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	17	100	100	76	54	105	88
Biology	10	100	100	40	39	76	79
Chemistry	8	100	100	25	49	78	85
Classical studies	5	100	100	60	56	88	91

Drama	8	100	100	13	40	80	84
Design and technology	1	100	98	0	35	80	78
Economics	6	100	100	0	52	60	88
English literature	49	100	100	41	47	85	86
French	3	100	99	33	52	80	88
Geography	12	100	100	42	45	88	84
History	17	100	100	29	45	73	85
Information and communication technology	1	100	96	0	25	80	70
Mathematics	15	93	100	33	56	71	89
Media studies	21	100	100	67	38	96	82
Music	3	100	99	33	39	80	81
Other social studies	17	100	100	29	43	80	82
Physics	4	100	97	25	47	65	82
Sociology	31	100	100	52	44	88	85
Spanish	6	100	100	83	50	103	87
Physical education	9	100	100	67	31	93	78

Level 2 vocational qualifications

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		% gaining distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Leisure and tourism	10	100	N/A	20	N/A	0	N/A
Health and social care	6	83	N/A	50	N/A	0	N/A

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English literature

English literature is provided at AS and A2-levels and was inspected in detail.

Provision in English literature is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of work in the AS and A2-level courses are above average
- Teachers' subject expertise is very strong which helps students to achieve well
- Curricular planning and lesson planning are very thorough: teachers draw on a very wide range of world literature
- The accommodation for some of the sixth form teaching is unwelcoming because it is not part of a specialist area

Commentary

102. The standards of work are above average in both Years 12 and 13. The overall results of the large group (almost 50 students) who took A2-level examinations in 2003 were just above the national average. Very few students left the course at the AS-level stage in 2003 but those

who did were awarded average grades. The written work of students and their contributions in lessons indicate that achievement is good for most students. The quality of longer essays improves markedly from Year 12 to Year 13 mainly as a result of thorough, diagnostic marking of first drafts by teachers and the keenness of students to reach high standards in literary criticism. Students spoken to feel that they are making good progress. In part this is due to the selection of texts which, while demanding, are also related well to relevant contemporary issues by the skill and enthusiasm of teachers.

103. The quality of teaching and students' learning are very good. Teachers reveal detailed knowledge of the texts and communicate enthusiasm very effectively to the students. In most lessons teachers adopt a seminar style and often make use of small group work. This requires all students to participate actively in reading, discussion and note-taking before contributing ideas and observations to the whole class group. Teachers have a clear picture of students' prior attainment and an up-to-date view of current performance and appropriate targets. The thorough preparation of lessons includes the best ways of stretching students who may have particular talents or learning needs. Curricular leadership is very good. The department draws successfully on the teaching skills of a large team and uses a flexible scheme of work which draws on a very wide range of literary texts. Two features which could be improved are the accommodation for teaching and the library provision for sixth form students.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

104. The school does not teach the key skill of communication and literacy separately. The expectation is that literacy will be taught within subjects. In some subjects there is clear evidence that this happens. In business education students make written evaluations of websites and in sociology teachers help students with the planning of essays. Teachers of English literature are particularly good at marking essays critically to improve the quality of writing. Standards of literacy are generally good within the AS and A2-level courses but the entrants to some subject courses arrive with lower standards of writing skills than might be expected. These include a lack of understanding of sentence structure and of how to create paragraphs. In media studies, for example, some students at the beginning of the sixth form need to be taught particular skills such as how to write in an evaluative style rather than descriptively. Very thorough teaching by specialist English and media studies teachers helps them to read critically, to take accurate notes, and to write more effectively. As a result, media studies results are very good. Standards of communication are more variable in the other courses, as in the leisure and tourism. Some students have competent literacy skills but others have comparatively low standards in spelling and use of grammar. The speaking skills of boys in some lessons are weaker than those of girls.

Modern foreign languages

The focus was on **French**, but **German** and **Spanish** were also sampled. The few students who have taken examinations in **German** in recent years have done well. One lesson in Year 13 was observed. Teaching was good, and the students worked productively. They learned new vocabulary and spoke with good accents. In **Spanish**, examination results were well above average in 2003. One lesson in Year 12 was observed in which students developed their listening skills with a recording about tourism in Valencia. Teaching was satisfactory and well matched to students' needs, since some with Hispanic backgrounds are taking AS and A2-levels this year.

Provision in French is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Irregular attendance in Year 13 impedes progress and continuity
- Students acquire good topic knowledge, but their oral skills are weak
- Teachers plan their lessons well and use worksheets effectively

- Students have no regular contact with a native speaker

Commentary

105. Results in the A2-level examinations in 2003 were average. AS-level results in 2003 were well below average; these students had been taught by three different teachers in three different schools. Four of the five students are continuing their study of French. Their standard of attainment is average, but achievement for some is constrained by irregular attendance and/or poor punctuality to lessons. In work seen during the inspection, standards and achievement in Year 12 are satisfactory. Students in Year 12 have a sound knowledge and understanding of their topics. They are acquiring the relevant vocabulary to enable them to read and write about different topics. Students lack the oral confidence to extend their vocabulary in discussion. Teachers provide regular coverage of grammatical points. By Year 13 students have acquired the relevant vocabulary to understand and write about the environment and social issues. In a lesson on crime and punishment, students linked up correctly official police terms in French with their English equivalents, and acquired new vocabulary. In a lively discussion after they had watched a short extract from a French film, however, their oral skills were not as high as expected at this stage and students were unable to express their points of view fully on whether the police should be armed.
106. Teaching and learning overall are satisfactory. Lessons are planned well, and worksheets and overhead transparencies are used effectively to aid students' understanding but do not encourage speaking enough. In the Year 12 lesson, for example, the teacher provided good examples of different ways to express opinions, but read them out to the students, instead of giving them the opportunity to develop their confidence by making them use the expressions. Teaching in the Year 13 lesson was good, because the teacher used the foreign language consistently and challenged all the students to become more involved in speaking. In interview, students said that they enjoyed the coursework and the discussions during the course, but they disliked the triple lessons. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Detailed records are kept and maintained efficiently, but occasionally information from other schools in the consortium is difficult to obtain. Resources are organised well. One of the two teachers is a native speaker but, in the absence of a foreign assistant, students do not have enough weekly practice to develop their oracy. Irregular attendance and poor punctuality give cause for concern, particularly in Year 13. In this group, only one student has attended every session so far this term, and students often arrive up to 30 minutes late.

MATHEMATICS

The inspection covered A2 and AS-level courses in mathematics with mechanics and statistics. In addition, the teaching of the application of number leading to the key skills element of the leisure and tourism course and the re-sit GCSE course, for those who did not gain grade C in Year 11, were also inspected.

Provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good in lessons
- Relationships are very good; teachers give freely of their time and students appreciate this
- There is capacity to improve students' A2-level results
- The standard of presentation of students' work is too variable

Commentary

107. Results in the A2-examinations in 2003 were below the national average. Results were much better in 2002, when they were well above average. One student followed the further mathematics course and attained an average pass grade. The numbers of students entered for A2-levels are small for the consortium, 12 in 2002 and 16 in 2003; current groups are of similar size. Standards of work seen are better than recent results would suggest, and are in

line with course expectations. Students from the A2 and AS-level groups have good number and algebraic skills and are able to apply these confidently, for example, in the calculation of expansions using the binomial theorem, and in using differentiation and integration in a variety of contexts in mechanics. Students' standards improve satisfactorily across the sixth form helped by the regular testing and use of previous examination questions. Students from other schools in the consortium also progress satisfactorily. Students in the GCSE re-sit group improve their recall skills and consolidate earlier learning. Leisure and tourism students learn about the application of number, a requirement of a key skills qualification. They demonstrate enthusiasm for the tasks (for example, decorating and furnishing a room) and are able to make sensible estimates as well as use simple formulae to find areas.

108. Students learn well on the AS and A2-level courses because the teaching is good, occasionally very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and plan lessons carefully; these are well-structured with clear objectives. Key words and phrases are emphasised and explained. Students are attentive and with the support given by their teachers increase their confidence in understanding and solving problems. They work co-operatively and very good relationships and behaviour provide a supportive atmosphere for learning. In a lesson on mechanics where the teaching was very good the teacher's excellent understanding and knowledge of the subject enabled him to plan the lesson well and also to target explanations to individual students' needs; students developed a good understanding of the concept of work done by a force. The teaching of the GCSE group is good and provides students with good guidance on tackling examination questions. In the application of number course, where teaching and learning are satisfactory, activities are well planned and useful discussion is promoted. However, a few students work too loudly and distract others.
109. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. Teachers are committed to improving standards and work well together to bring this about. Regular formal and informal meetings are held to discuss ideas and ensure continuity of the teaching of shared groups. However, there are too few opportunities for sharing observations of teaching and hence no sharing of good practice; this limits the improvements that can be made. The marking of students' class-work is mostly done by the students themselves and hence does not contain detail to help them see how they might improve. Nevertheless, regular tests and use of past examination papers are used to assess their progress. The standard of presentation of the students' work throughout the sixth form is quite varied; it is too frequently untidy and left undated. Teachers have identified strategies to help improve standards overall by monitoring attendance, punctuality and insisting on dates for handing in work. Not enough use is made of taking notes and copying of examples of new work to provide reference material for students when they are revising their work for examinations.

Mathematics across the curriculum

110. Links are established between the mathematics department and other subjects by way of teacher-consultants to promote the use of number. While there is no consistent approach to the development of mathematics across the curriculum, students generally cope well. In mathematics, students' standards of numeracy are very good. Students are confident and most proficient in mental calculations, calculators are well used and students improve their competence in manipulating complex formulae. In science and media studies standards are very good; students are competent in a range of calculations and graphs. Students in geography, economics and sociology use a variety of statistical measures and are able to interpret data and use charts and graphs to illustrate findings.

SCIENCE

Advanced level biology, chemistry and physics are provided. The focus of this inspection was on biology. Chemistry and physics were sampled. Recent results in both subjects have been average and in some years chemistry results have been a little better than this. Nearly all Year 12 students are enrolled at the school but in Year 13 the groups include students from other consortium schools.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and work hard to make lessons interesting. Students were learning well in both years in chemistry. In Year 13 physics progress, while variable and reflecting students' earlier experience of the subject, was satisfactory overall.

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers use their very good knowledge and understanding of biology effectively to promote learning
- Enrichment through the use of visitors and field trips stimulates interest and learning
- The potential of sharing very good teaching practice is underdeveloped
- Little use is made of ICT to support students' independent learning

Commentary

111. A2-level results have been at least average over the last four years, and in 2002 they were well above average. Results for the Year 12 students taking biology at AS-level were below average in 2003 but average the year before. The indications are that they will be average this year. Overall the results in this subject are not as good as those in other sixth form subjects. The reason for this is that most students taking biology are not those who attained the highest grades in science at GCSE. Students from other schools in the consortium are making similar progress to those based at this school. Standards of work seen in lessons were above average as a result of strengths in teaching, good relationships and the interest that students show in their work. Students in Year 13 demonstrated a good grasp of issues regarding pesticides and DDT and were able to speak well on the subject to the rest of the class. In Year 12 students coped well with the concept of meiosis and were adept at removing the testis from locusts and producing cell squashes to be viewed under the microscope. The challenging teaching seen in these classes is resulting in good achievement.

112. Teaching is mostly very good and lessons are well structured. At the start of lessons teachers ask well-focused questions that make students think about previous work and provide a good basis for learning. Teachers have good knowledge and understanding of biology with different strengths. They teach topics in a way that interests students. Students learn well. Good use is made of available resources including the overhead projectors. Photocopied sheets provide information that supports concepts in the lesson and these also include questions that test the students' understanding. A good range of books provides opportunities for extended reading in the subject. Students show a willingness to answer questions even though they sometimes get them wrong. Feedback from teachers helps them make improvements in their learning. Comments by teachers in their books are supportive but do not provide enough advice on how to improve. Teachers make good use of computers for teaching and for the production of resources but little use of computer programmes and simulations of meiosis and predator-prey relationships, that could improve students' understanding of key concepts. The good teaching and learning result from biology being well led and managed but there is little monitoring of teaching. Teachers are well qualified, work well together and have a commitment to improving standards. Visitors to the school, lectures elsewhere and regular field visits enrich learning.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

113. Information and communication technology (ICT) was not inspected in detail at this inspection. No results are available. One very good Year 12 Key Skills lesson was sampled. The course is well planned and presented and the achievement of students attending was good. Unfortunately very few students opt for the course and attendance is irregular.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

114. Most sixth form students have satisfactory competence in a range of applications which they use effectively, often to extend work done in lessons. Good examples of students' word-processing their work were seen in most subjects. Similarly, most students research using the Internet for coursework assignments. In music they use ICT very effectively as a learning tool. Such development is not general, however. More use could be made of programmes to deepen conceptual understanding in science, for the presentation of ideas and analyses of data in sociology, and for spreadsheets in business.

HUMANITIES

Classical studies, geography, history and sociology were inspected in detail. Religious education is also provided and was inspected separately, as this is a Catholic school.

Classical studies

Provision in classical studies is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve very well
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge
- Lack of a subject base makes it difficult to enhance learning by means of displays and distracts from the ethos for learning

Commentary

115. In recent years, results at A2-level have been close to the national average, although no student has attained an A grade. However, in last year's AS-level examinations one student successfully achieved this grade. There has been a slow rise in standards at A2-level. In the current Year 13, standards in classical civilisation are in line with national expectations. Much of the teaching at A2-level is good, with a high level of teacher expertise to which students respond well. However, the regular late arrival of some students and the disruption that ensues means that teachers have to work hard to maintain a purposeful learning environment. Students in Years 12 and 13 are drawn from across the sixth form consortium. In the current Year 12 the majority of students are from La Sainte Union but the proportions are reversed in Year 13. Many students are attracted to La Sainte Union by the opportunity to take classical studies. Practically all of the students have no prior secondary school experience of it. There are no significant differences in the attainment of boys and girls or students with different school or ethnic backgrounds.
116. Lessons are well-planned and questioning is used effectively. Teachers are aware of the wide ability range in the groups and the work is well structured to take account of this. However, sometimes too much time is spent on work that does not challenge higher attaining students to extend their learning; for example, drawing posters about characters in Greek plays. Students enjoy the subject and like learning about the literature and belief systems of the classical world which supports their progress. Although they respond positively to the Roman Britain module of the course, they fail to see how it links with their work on literature. This is something that needs to be made more explicit. The teachers extend the vocabulary of students in a well-planned way, particularly by using literary terms (for example, *stichomythia* = *two actors speaking alternate lines*). Written work is set regularly and careful marking helps students to raise their standards. In a good lesson for students in Year 13, the teacher used an examiner's mark scheme and a sample answer to develop awareness of how to structure work more effectively. She also explored the way that Vergil used imagery to suggest the luxury of Dido's palace in the *Aeneid*. This resulted in the students having a heightened

awareness of literary devices. Students make some use of the Internet to research topics and many word-process their work. The head of history manages this subject well and the planning is clear. Resources are adequate but the lack of a specialist teaching room means that it is difficult to enrich the ambience of the teaching. The students have opportunities to visit various sites of archaeological interest and attend lectures and performances of classical plays. This all makes a good contribution to their cultural development.

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students are well challenged to learn independently by very good teaching
- Students respond well to the many opportunities for debate and discussion
- Fieldwork contributes well to the above average achievement at the end of Year 13
- Not enough extended writing is provided to challenge the high attaining students

Commentary

117. Current provision is for one geography group in Year 13, preparing for A2-level examinations. Provision suffered a set-back because of staffing difficulties, which are now resolved. The group taking A2-level in 2003 was transferred to another school in the consortium and their results were above average. The general pattern in preceding years was of high results, but they dipped in 2002. The standards reached by students in recent modular examinations indicate results to be above the national average in 2004. The quality of fieldwork is good and contributes significantly to improving standards. There is no significant difference in the performance of boys and girls. Standards in general classwork seen in Year 13 were in line with course expectations with strengths in individual project and extended coursework, including the use of ICT and statistical techniques, which were above average; achievement in this area is good. Students have a good understanding of natural and man-made hazards and of the impact of development-aid and fair trade on impoverished countries.

118. Teaching and learning are very good. Students benefit from the very secure subject knowledge of the staff and questioning techniques which probe beyond the superficial answer. Students are well challenged to extract and summarise information from a range of current sources, including the Internet. They respond with enthusiasm to the considerate and courteous approach of staff and are developing well as mature and independent learners. Preparation for examination techniques is good. Not enough opportunities are provided, however, for extended essay writing to allow students to evaluate evidence and draw reasoned conclusions. Leadership of the department is good with a clear commitment to restoring sixth form teaching groups and to raising standards. The staff work very well as a team and management of the department is efficient.

Example of outstanding practice

Excellent use of the teacher's knowledge inspired learning in a very good Year 13 lesson

The teacher's energy and dynamism in a Year 13 lesson on fire hazards in Australia created momentum so that the class responded with enthusiasm and maturity. Drawing on direct experience and practical examples of fire prevention the teacher focused students' interests sharply and they took initiative in seeking, organising and presenting information, including analysis of data on the causes of fires. Overall they achieved very well.

History

Provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in lessons are average and better than examination results
- The quality of teaching is good, leading to good learning, so that students who attend regularly achieve well
- Absence and lateness have a negative effect on examination results
- Leadership and management of the courses are very good

Commentary

119. Standards are in line with national expectations. AS and A2-level results have been consistently below the national average for the past three years, mainly because a significant number of students, whose level of attendance and punctuality to lessons is poor, are entered for the examination. This inevitably brings down the overall results so that they do not properly reflect the standard of attainment of those students whose attendance and work is consistent and who therefore achieve well. There is no significant difference between the results in 2003, when all the students were from La Sainte Union, and results in other years when there have been mixed groups including students from other schools in the consortium. However, standards seen have been at least average, with some above-average work in Year 12, and students achieve well. No students are held back in their work by weak literacy or ICT skills. The higher attaining students write consistently good essays, expressing complex arguments clearly and drawing together conflicting evidence about, for example, the growth of the Civil Rights movement in the USA. Lower attaining students can also write at length but rely too much on narrative instead of argument to deliver their points. All are very good at coherent and reasoned discussion, both in small groups and the whole class.
120. The quality of teaching is good which leads to good learning in lessons. Planning is very strong and lessons are designed so that students can play an active part in their own learning, while taking advantage of the excellent subject knowledge of their teacher. Students are encouraged to analyse and speculate about source material, and to draw their own conclusions about, for example, such issues as the wisdom of the execution of Charles I. Some groups were engaged in the valuable exercise of assessing and marking examination essays written by other – anonymous – students, which gave them a valuable insight into the expectations of examiners. Few students drop out once the course has started and the students who were seen have extremely positive views of the subject. Most of those questioned chose to study history because they enjoy the subject rather than because they see it as being useful in a wide range of proposed careers, although a few are planning to read history at university. However, the tendency towards a high level of absence indicates that not all course members share this positive view. The small department is very well led and managed. In the short time she has been in post she has reviewed the syllabus and devoted considerable time to identifying a raft of strategies aimed at raising standards. The capacity for standards to improve is good.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A2-level results are above average due to very good teaching
- Students achieve well in acquiring sociological concepts and skills
- Teachers' excellent relationships with students cultivate very good attitudes
- Very regular and detailed assessment by teachers helps to deepen critical understanding

- Opportunities to use ICT to analyse sociological data are limited

Commentary

121. Sociology is very popular both in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form, reflected in large classes. At least half of the Year 12 students took GCSE in sociology, gaining well above average grades. In 2003, A2-level results were above average and among the strongest in the school as all passed and more than half gained high (A, B) grades. Both girls and boys achieved well, several very well from comparatively low starting points at GCSE, maintaining the trend of good achievement. AS-level results were well above average with over a half gaining top grades. A very high proportion of students remain on courses they have started because they really enjoy lessons. Standards in lessons and work seen are high. Year 12 students analyse data relating ethnicity to achievement in schools, and critically discuss suggestions for reducing racial discrimination. In an excellent lesson, Year 13 students showed a well-above average knowledge of sociological concepts when applying a Marxist perspective to domestic violence. Their ability to work co-operatively to develop skills of analysis and enquiry was excellent. As computers are not readily available in lessons students do not use ICT enough to present ideas or analyse statistical data. They fluently discuss experience from family life and occasional visits to local institutions. Excellent attitudes result from teachers' high expectations, so most students fulfil their potential.
122. Teaching and learning are very good, and often excellent, so students achieve well and sometimes very well in lessons. They develop very good critical evaluation skills. Teachers' very well structured planning, prompt starter activities and excellent worksheets on topical issues and theory help students to sustain interest and remain fully engaged. Through discussion in pairs, they feed back opinions and draft written definitions and evaluations using teachers' first-class guidelines on writing. They thus develop good literacy skills. Essays are set regularly and marked promptly. Detailed, constructive comments help students to develop critical views and improve examination technique. Helped by teachers' excellent subject knowledge, students debate moral, social and cultural issues very well, and summarise conclusions confidently. A very well qualified and experienced team of teachers is excellently led and managed. Teachers update schemes of work regularly. All students, including those identified as gifted and talented, are fully stretched. Staff monitor individual students' progress very well. The capacity for further improvement is good.

Example of outstanding practice

Excellent lesson planning and questioning encouraged critical evaluation in a Year 13 lesson

In a Year 13 lesson on crime and deviance, students learned to continually make links with theory, to question viewpoints, evidence and the validity of data, in response to the teacher's questions. Students' knowledge of sociological concepts developed well, especially their understanding of the need for validity, which they explored in class and group discussion. Excellent planning underpinned the lesson and current topics, for example, the cost of bottled water, captured students' interest. Excellent teaching engendered excellent attitudes resulting in high standards.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

Provision in design and technology (textiles) is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching staff are knowledgeable and well qualified, and work hard to develop students' skills and knowledge of the subject
- Some students produce high quality coursework and make good use of ICT in their designing and making
- Resources for textiles are good and these are used effectively by students

Commentary

123. Results in the AS-level examination in 2003 were below average. However, standards seen during the inspection were high, and indicate that results at the end of Year 13 should be better. Several students have made good use of their graphic and design skills in their course work folders, and have produced well made complex products. The achievement of students overall is good. They produce high quality work including relevant applications of ICT. Students registered at La Sainte Union and those from other schools in the consortium achieve similarly well. Teaching is good with a range of appropriate teaching styles, so students learn well. In one lesson the teacher made effective use of tutorial skills to check the progress students were making with coursework, and also to check their understanding of key points. Students responded well and were able to justify their design decisions. All students speak positively about the course and enjoy the work, with several indicating that they intend to pursue higher education courses related to work in the fashion industry.
124. The course, which was introduced in September 2002, has been planned very well with all appropriate requirements of the syllabus met. Considerable effort has been made to include the industrial elements and these have generally been successful. Good use is made of somewhat limited ICT resources. Overall, leadership and management of design and technology in the sixth form is good.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve extremely well: standards are well above the national average
- Teaching and learning are very good
- Very good use is made of the department's ICT and computer-aided design resources
- Independent work contributes effectively to the personal development of students
- Management and leadership of the courses are very good

Commentary

125. High grades were achieved in the A2-level examinations in 2003. Results and standards overall are well above the national average. Students work in a wide range of both two and three-dimensional media and to a variety of scales. Practical work is closely related to contextual studies. When discussing the theme *Icons*, Year 12 students showed above-average knowledge and understanding of the use of iconography in contemporary art. Sketchbooks show a lively, vigorous approach to investigating and documenting ideas, and the use of multimedia in experimentation. Very good use is made of computer-aided design. Year 13 students electronically scan their own work, and manipulate images to develop strikingly original abstract compositions. For example, for the theme *city* students have explored the local architecture, and collected some powerful images of parts of buildings in strong light; they have observed the break-down of structures into simple forms, and linked the style of their work to the Futurists and Cubists. Computers are also used very effectively for contextual studies, and the Internet for researching artists and art movements. Students' attitudes and approach to independent work is excellent. They work extremely hard in practical sessions, and outside lesson time. They are very eager to learn about art and design concepts, and the aims and objectives of art movements, as reflected in their sketchbooks. Their achievement is very good in relation to their individual capabilities, and prior attainment.

126. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers are very enthusiastic, they have a very good command of the subject and a good knowledge of the examination requirements and assessment criteria. Students are encouraged with high quality individual feedback on their work. There is a very productive, purposeful atmosphere in lessons. Good student numbers promote valuable interaction, diversity of approach to topics, and sharp evaluation and competition. Leadership is inspirational and the courses are extremely well managed. Teamwork is very effective in promoting well organised learning. There is a clear vision of how the subject should develop, a strong sense of purpose, and high aspirations for developing students' visual education in innovative ways. Many links are made with other subjects, and students' social, moral and cultural development is enriched through extra-curricular activities, trips to art galleries, and working with artists in the community. The department is very instrumental in assisting with the training of post-graduate certificate of education students from London colleges and benefits from the fresh ideas that they bring. A major contribution is made to display around the school. Good improvements have been made in recent years, and the number of students wishing to join the courses is increasing.

Example of outstanding practice

Excellent use of teacher's knowledge in a very good Year 12 lesson

The teacher's lively and vigorous approach inspired Year 12 students developing ideas for the theme *icons*, part of their examination requirements. Students were highly motivated and pooled a wide variety of ideas. Discussion, enhanced by the teacher's excellent knowledge, extended students' awareness of a range of contemporary styles and artists, including Damien Hirst and Vivienne Westwood. Students used their sketch books creatively and productively. By the end of the lesson they had brain-stormed ideas and started to link them with possible outcomes. Very good progress was made.

Music

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A2 and AS-level results are well above the national averages
- The department deservedly enjoys a very good reputation for the quality of teaching and the range of musical opportunities on offer in school, locally and regionally
- Students' achievement is very good; they combine high performance levels with a breadth and depth of musical knowledge and understanding

Commentary

127. In 2003, AS-level results were well above national averages with over half of the 26 candidates obtaining A or B grades. Since the last inspection A2-level results have been consistently well above national averages. Each year, students go on to study music at universities and music colleges. In 2003, the very poor attendance of five male students depressed the A2-level results. If these results are disregarded, then A-level results for 2003 were in line with the school's usual pattern. Standards are high and performance standards are often excellent.
128. Sixth form students are very satisfied with the quality and variety of opportunities for music-making. They like the rather distinctive, friendly "family" ethos of the department and they feel that they receive a great deal of support in all aspects of their musical learning. They speak with deep appreciation of the director of music's inspirational, energetic teaching and the unusually high levels of commitment and musicality of all their teachers. They find teachers' fortnightly reviews of their folders very helpful because these reviews provide them with excellent ongoing individual support and a clear understanding of how to improve. They value the many opportunities for taking a lead in setting up and directing ensembles. Students' very good learning and high achievement across all areas of musical learning are direct results of consistently very good teaching. Teachers have an impressive command of musical knowledge and skills. They place great emphasis on equipping students with a conceptual

framework within which students can discover, experience and analyse music for themselves. They structure lessons in an interesting and varied way and enable students to make very effective use of ICT for their listening and composing. Visiting instrumental teachers and the composer-in-residence enrich the learning environment by playing alongside students or directing ensembles. The excellent, visionary leadership is supported by good management of this large, vibrant department. The department recognises the need to modify aspects of its teaching approach to tackle the underachievement of lower attaining students and to improve the effectiveness of its monitoring of students' progress.

Example of outstanding practice

Excellent rehearsal of La SWAP orchestra

Under the baton of the director of music the orchestra rehearsed a complex piece, "*Once upon around the block*", by La Sainte Union's composer-in-residence John Evans. Early in the rehearsal the instrumental sections wrestled with some very challenging and irregular rhythms, time signature changes, dissonant harmonies and uneven phrasing. The conductor used his intimate knowledge of the music and the orchestra, giving brisk and clear musical directions and illustrations to refine and improve individual instruments and sections of the orchestra. Students quickly mastered the notes, and the conductor turned his attention to dynamics and expression. As the performance took shape, the quality of the ensemble-playing improved and the orchestra began to play with confidence and conviction. There were moments of real beauty in this piece and some fine, sensitive playing by the oboist and a number of other key players.

Media studies

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at A2-level are well above the national average
- The course is rigorously planned by well-qualified teachers
- Students participate fully in lessons and achieve very well
- Leadership is dedicated to ensuring the highest possible standards
- The course attracts an increasing number of students

Commentary

129. Media studies is a well-established, successful examination course. Most students have not studied the subject before Year 12 and many start with low prior attainment at GCSE. Examination results in 2003 were well above the national average. Two-thirds of the students taking AS and A2-level examinations attained the highest grades (A, B). For most students, and particularly for those based in other sixth forms, media studies' grades represent their best results. Very few students do not continue to A2 in Year 13. This reflects the enjoyment which students gain from the course and the very good teaching they receive. Results indicate an upward trend since the last inspection. Standards in lessons are well-above average. Students achieve very well. Through the emphasis in teaching on linking theory and practice, students quickly learn to apply media concepts when evaluating texts and images. They can define and use specialist terms confidently and exemplify them with imagination, drawing on a wide range of media. Higher attaining students produce critical and evaluative work which shows their good understanding. Lower attaining students have a sound grasp of concepts, for example, in examining gender and audience, but their writing is more descriptive than evaluative. Students produce practical work of a high quality. In Year 12, they manipulate still photography with flair in creating a series of advertisements. Good access to computers enables them to use ICT both for presentations of their work and for research. This represents a significant improvement since the last inspection.
130. As a result of the high expectations and well-structured teaching, students' learning is very good and most students who attend regularly make rapid progress. They collaborate well and support each other. Their work is stimulated by good community links and contact with

professional media organisations in theatre and television. They are very appreciative of the time teachers give to monitoring, marking and reviewing their work individually and the excellent examination guidance they receive. This leads to high levels of interest and motivation and students exceeding their targets. The subject is led and managed very well. There is a strong desire to achieve the highest possible standards both in students' performance and in the quality of teaching. Much time and effort are spent in discussion and review in order to improve further. As a result, media studies has developed well in recent years and is one of the highest performing subjects in the sixth form.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Sports studies is provided as an examination subject and extra-curricular physical education for all students; both were inspected. A leisure and tourism Level 2 vocational course is also provided and was sampled. In 2003 all students gained the full qualification; a minority achieved a merit. Standards, teaching and learning in a lesson observed were satisfactory, but the portfolios of students' individual coursework projects are better than this and indicate an improvement.

Sports studies

Provision in sports studies and physical education is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- AS and A2-level results are consistently high and students do better than in their other subjects
- Rigorous target-setting is well focused on extending challenge and raising standards
- The quality of teaching is excellent

Commentary

131. Standards reached by the majority of students in the A2-level sports studies course in Year 13 are well above average. All groups of students including those who join the course from other schools are achieving very well. There is no difference in attainment between boys and girls or students from minority ethnic groups. Students have a very good depth of knowledge, evident in course work and homework assignments. Particular strengths are in the anatomical and physiological units of work. The highest attaining students produce work of outstanding quality. It is exceptionally well researched and presented. Note-taking is of a very good quality and written work shows very good independent research. Students use ICT effectively when presenting their work and good use is made of a variety of sources for research. Numeracy skills are used to record and analyse data but could be developed further to give added depth to learning. Students speak confidently about how the course has enabled them to improve their practical performance in their chosen activities through their understanding of physiology and training methods. Standards in Year 12 are above average. While the range of ability within the group is wider, the majority are achieving very well relative to their predicted grades. They have a good depth of knowledge and are quick to grasp new concepts. They link their theoretical knowledge well to practical work. High standards are reached in their chosen activities. All students speak very highly of the quality of teaching and the support that is given enabling them to maximise their achievement. Nearly all students choose to continue to A2-level. Standards in extra-curricular activities are above average, for example, in athletics, football, swimming, trampolining and netball. A good range of recreational activities is provided for all students in the consortium.
132. The quality of teaching and its impact on learning are excellent. The teachers effectively challenge the students intellectually and physically. They use their subject expertise to plan well, setting a range of challenging tasks to develop students' skills in independent research, presentation techniques, teaching their fellow students and note-taking. As a result the consolidation of knowledge is excellent. Homework assignments are planned effectively to engage all levels of attainment within the class, especially those who have not done GCSE

physical education. Target-setting is rigorous, reviewed regularly and increases expectations in relation to students' ability. Students enjoy the challenge of the courses and activity programme. They regularly organise clubs and events for younger pupils and use their well-developed skills to improve standards. The quality of external coaches is also very good and has a positive impact on the students' learning. Leadership of the department is excellent. There is a very good range of examination courses on offer and a varied recreational programme of sport that is well attended. Management of all the different groups of students is exceptionally good and leads to a strong mutual respect between teachers and students. It also inspires students to careers associated with sport. Links with the University of Westminster are well established and enable students to have first-hand experience of working in a physiology laboratory. This also gives them good insight into university life.

Example of outstanding practice

Excellently planned and focused lesson in Year 13

The teacher's excellent use of knowledge to explain the physiology of recovery after exercise enabled Year 13 students to make very rapid progress in understanding energy systems. Questions were exceptionally well-focused to lead students on in their learning. Students used technical vocabulary very confidently, and explained the action of enzymes and the role of lactic acid in muscle fatigue and the biochemistry of recovery in replacing the oxygen debt. The topic had been extremely well planned with excellent activities and links to practical examples, such as the timing of the game in tennis. Students were highly motivated and respectful of the support they had received from the teacher which had clearly helped them to achieve very highly.

BUSINESS

Business studies

Provision in business studies is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good features of teaching help students to develop good attitudes to their work
- Students use ICT well for word processing, but not enough for financial analysis
- Standards have improved and are now satisfactory, although some students could do better
- The new combined business and economics AS-level course has started well

Commentary

133. The Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) is provided in Year 12 (as a double award) and Year 13 (single award) with at least half the students coming from other schools in the consortium. In 2003, results of the AVCE business course were below average as only two students gained the top A and B grades, and only three-quarters passed. Results reflected little improvement from previous years and unsatisfactory achievement for all but higher-attaining students compared with their attainment at GCSE. A new combined business and economics AS-level course has started well in Year 12, in which standards are average. Current Year 12 students on AVCE courses show an improving trend, and AVCE and AS-level students are working at near national expectations. Students of all levels of attainment make satisfactory progress in lessons. They develop satisfactory skills of communication, number and ICT, make good use of word processing for reports, but do not yet use spreadsheets enough to analyse financial data. AVCE students in Year 13 present well-written reports on the use of ICT in business. Work shows improvement from previous standards, and is broadly in line with course expectations. Students research effectively on the Internet and sometimes in part-time jobs in local businesses. They show good attitudes and students of all school and ethnic backgrounds collaborate well in groups.

134. Teaching and learning are satisfactory, with good features. Well-structured lessons include interesting task sheets well linked to examination mark schemes. Teachers have good relationships with students and stimulate lively discussion. This motivates students well, but some work at too slow a pace. Teachers' good subject expertise helps students to gain satisfactory understanding of marketing strategies, but teachers do not use enough case studies or real business examples to broaden understanding of concepts of business structure. Work experience placements recently carried out by Year 12 AVCE students show improvement in the use of links to business, but visits and speakers are infrequent. The subject is well led and satisfactorily managed by an experienced teacher with the help of enthusiastic less experienced colleagues. Teachers assess students' work well; marking is regular and fairly detailed and, in the best practice, teachers give targets to help students improve their AVCE assignments. Students' progress against predicted grades is not yet monitored rigorously but there are good plans for strengthening this. The introduction of the AS-level course and development plans show sound capacity for improvement.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

135. Health and social care (Level 2) is provided in Year 12. A tutorial lesson focused on review of progress and future planning was sampled during which students learned well, having benefited from work experience and a recent Careers Fair in Camden. Recent results have been a little above average.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

136. A critical thinking course, examined at AS-level, has been successfully introduced. No lessons were provided during the inspection so this could not be sampled but recent results have been very high. In addition to their examination courses all sixth formers have weekly tutorial lessons in groups based on subject choices and these were sampled. Students were reviewing their progress and, in one lesson, their attendance. Lessons generally were satisfactory. The pace tended to be a little relaxed, except in a very good session where the teacher with a vocational group very effectively made them take responsibility for producing a booklet for Year 11 pupils through her stimulating approach and well-focused questions. Students have the opportunity to join a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including music and physical education, which are commented on in the relevant subject reports.

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	3	2
How inclusive the school is		2
How the school's effectiveness has changed since its last inspection	4	4
Cost effectiveness of the sixth form / value for money provided by the school	4	3
Overall standards achieved		2
Pupils' achievement	3	2
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities		2
Attendance	5	5
Attitudes	3	2
Behaviour, including the extent of exclusions	2	2
Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development		1
The quality of education provided by the school		3
The quality of teaching	3	3
How well pupils learn	3	3
The quality of assessment	3	4
How well the curriculum meets pupils needs	2	3
Enrichment of the curriculum, including out-of-school activities		3
Accommodation and resources	3	3
Pupils' care, welfare, health and safety		3
Support, advice and guidance for pupils	3	4
How well the school seeks and acts on pupils' views	4	4
The effectiveness of the school's links with parents		2
The quality of the school's links with the community	3	2
The school's links with other schools and colleges	2	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	3
The effectiveness of management	4	3

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

