

INSPECTION REPORT

KING EDWARD VI HANDSWORTH SCHOOL

Handsworth

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103551

Headteacher: Miss Elspeth Insch OBE

Lead inspector: Selwyn Ward

Dates of inspection: 21st – 25th February 2005

Inspection number: 268841

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar (selective)
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of students:	11 – 18
Gender of students:	Female
Number on roll:	917
School address:	Rose Hill Road Handsworth Birmingham
Postcode:	B21 9AR
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Email address:	office@kingedwardvi.bham.sch.uk
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr R A Mansell FRICS
Date of previous inspection:	8 th February 1999

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

King Edward VI Handsworth is an average size grammar school in the inner city area of Birmingham catering for girls aged 11 to 18. The sixth form is larger than average. The school is part of the King Edward VI Foundation of seven schools in the city. The girls come from a very wide range of ethnic backgrounds. Around one in three is of white British background and a similar number are of Asian and Asian British backgrounds. There are no students at an early stage of learning English as an additional language. The girls come from a wide range of social backgrounds but, taken overall, they are socially advantaged. This is reflected in the below average number known to be eligible for free school meals. The proportion of students with special educational needs is very low. They include a small number of girls that the school has identified as having additional learning needs, such as dyslexia, but who have not formally been categorised as having special educational needs. The girls have to pass a selective test to earn a place at the school and their attainment on entry is very high. Some girls join the school in the sixth form. They too are of high ability. The school has *Sportsmark*. It has specialist status as a performing arts college. It is one of a small number of schools that has appeared twice on Her Majesty's Chief Inspector's *Most Successful Schools* list.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities (main school)	Subject responsibilities (sixth form)
9271	Selwyn Ward	Lead inspector		
19653	Libby Dickson	Lay inspector		
2501	Raye Allison-Smith	Team inspector	Art	
32785	Win Allt	Team inspector		Biology
31238	Gordon Clubb	Team inspector	Design technology	
11746	Robin Coulthard	Team inspector	Music; religious education	Music
20476	Marian Freeman	Team inspector	History	History
14490	Susan Jackson	Team inspector	Citizenship; special educational needs	
23487	Pat Kitley	Team inspector	English	English literature; theatre studies
23307	Neil McDonough	Team inspector	Physical education; dance	
2447	Faysal Mikdadi	Team inspector	French; German; English as an additional language	French
3242	Mike Newman	Team inspector	Science	Chemistry; physics
6138	Keith Page	Team inspector	Mathematics	Mathematics
10817	George Rayner	Team inspector	Geography	
18072	Joan Stephens	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

King Edward VI Handsworth is an outstanding school. Standards are very high and girls achieve exceptionally well as a result of the excellent teaching. The headmistress and leadership team have been extremely effective in establishing an ethos where the girls are very keen to work hard and achieve their best, both in academic subjects and in the very wide range of other activities on offer. This includes those in the performing arts, for which the school has been awarded specialist status. King Edward VI Handsworth provides excellent value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are

- The girls achieve exceptionally well because they benefit from excellent teaching
- The leadership and management of the school are excellent
- Though they come from very many different backgrounds, the girls get on very well together; their behaviour is exemplary and they are avid learners
- Performing arts status has helped to broaden and enrich the curriculum as well as the links with other schools and with the wider community
- Information and communication technology (ICT) is not used as well as it could be to support learning in other subjects
- Arrangements for the girls' welfare and support are excellent

There has been very good improvement and maintenance of very high standards since the last inspection. Standards have continued to rise and there has been further improvement in the quality of the already very good provision previously reported. There were no major weaknesses identified in the last report, and most of the minor issues raised have been tackled successfully. There has been improvement in the use of ICT as a tool for learning across the different subjects of the curriculum but, although this is now good, it is still not as good as it could be in comparison with the very high quality of provision in most other parts of the school.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		Year 2002	Year 2003	Year 2004	Year 2004
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A*	A*	A*	A
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	A*	A*	A*	

Key: A – very high (top 5 per cent of schools); A – well above average; B – above average; C – average; D – below average; E – well below average; E* – very low (bottom 5 per cent of schools)*

For Year 11, similar schools are those whose students achieved similar results at the end of Year 9.

The girls' achievement is excellent. Standards are very high throughout the school in almost every subject. Even taking account of the girls' very high ability when they join the school, the progress they make is excellent – particularly in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. Year 9 test scores and examination results at GCSE, AS and A-level have consistently been in the top 5 per cent of schools nationally, and work seen in the inspection was of a similarly very high level. Examination results at GCSE and A-level have continued to improve even on the very high standards reported in the last inspection. There is no significant difference in the attainment of girls from different ethnic backgrounds. The very small number of girls with special educational needs do just as impressively as the others in the school.

The girls' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are excellent. The girls come from a very wide range of different ethnic backgrounds but they all mix and get on extremely well together. They respect and value highly the many different cultures reflected in the school. The girls' behaviour is exemplary and they have exceptionally positive attitudes to learning. They are eager to participate, to work hard and to do as well as they can. Attendance is excellent.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided is excellent. The development of the school as a performing arts college has significantly broadened the academic curriculum provided. An outstanding range of extracurricular activities, including additional taught courses, very significantly enhances a curriculum that is ideally suited to the needs and aspirations of academically able girls. It caters fully for the individual needs of the girls, many of whom are gifted and talented. The girls' personal development and their academic progress are extremely well monitored and this contributes to the very high standard of support and guidance provided. There are excellent links with the local community and very good links with parents, who are kept very well informed about their daughters' progress. There is an excellent match of teaching staff to the needs of the curriculum, with all subjects taught by specialists. Other resources and accommodation are good.

Teaching and learning are excellent. Teachers have considerable subject expertise. Their excellent planning ensures that lessons include varied activities that build very effectively on what the girls have learnt before. There is a very high level of challenge in lessons and time is used exceedingly well so that the girls get a lot done. Homework is used particularly well to reinforce and extend what has been learnt in the classroom. Relationships throughout the school are extremely strong and this helps to motivate the girls so that they are enthusiastic learners. In a small minority of nonetheless successful lessons, teachers do not give the girls enough opportunities to develop their own ideas. Assessment is very good. The school's recently revised marking policy has increasingly focused on ensuring that the girls know what they need to do to improve their work.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are excellent. The headmistress provides excellent leadership and is very well supported by a strong leadership team and an able team of subject and department heads. Despite its success, the school has been careful to avoid complacency. Through a thorough and accurate evaluation of how well it is doing, and identifying areas that could be improved, the school has been highly successful in maintaining and improving on the very high quality of provision. It has created an exceptionally positive climate for learning where all of the girls are made to feel valued and are helped to achieve their very best. Governors are knowledgeable and very supportive of the school and do a very good job.

PARENTS' AND STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents express very positive views of the school, and the views expressed by the girls are exceptionally positive.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

There are no major areas for improvement. However, girls could be given more opportunities to use ICT across the curriculum.

SIXTH FORM

OVERALL EVALUATION

King Edward VI Handsworth has an outstanding sixth form. As teaching is rarely less than good, and in nearly four out of five of the lessons observed it was even better, often of the highest quality, the profile of teaching is excellent. Students' learning and achievement are outstanding. Examination results are very high. Students' progress is exceptionally well monitored and supported and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is catered for extremely well. Students' behaviour is exemplary and they have exceedingly positive attitudes to learning. Their drive for success in all their studies is impressive. The sixth form is led and managed very effectively and its cost effectiveness is excellent.

The main strengths are

- Achievement is excellent as a result of the consistently very high quality of teaching
- The extremely positive attitudes of students contribute significantly to their overall achievement and the ethos of the school
- Students benefit from a range of courses that are particularly well matched to their needs and career aspirations
- Students are exceptionally well supported and guided in their academic progress

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form are shown below. They are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all sixth form subjects were inspected.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Excellent in English and French. In English, teachers' excellent subject knowledge, enthusiasm for literature and very high expectations enable students to learn and achieve exceptionally well. In French, teachers' excellent planning of lessons and consistent use of French ensure that every student has the opportunity to make outstanding progress.
Mathematics	Very good. Standards are very high because teachers have high expectations and use their very good subject knowledge and expertise to effectively demonstrate and explain new ideas in stimulating ways. Students have an exceptional desire and aptitude to learn independently that enhances their progress and achievement.
Science	Very good in biology and chemistry, and excellent in physics. In all three subjects, the teachers know the students well, giving them extra support outside lessons where needed. In biology, the teachers have excellent subject knowledge, which they use very effectively to help their students achieve. Very good extracurricular opportunities extend the sixth form curriculum. In chemistry, teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and apply this very well to a highly practical course. Achievement is very good and the students' attitudes are very positive. In physics, teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to promote independent learning and very good achievement. Students' attitudes are excellent and they particularly value the style of teaching.
ICT	Not inspected in the sixth form.
Humanities	Excellent in history. Standards are very high because teachers have very good subject expertise and use this to challenge students to become flexible thinkers and able historians.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	Not inspected in the sixth form.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
Visual and performing arts and media	Excellent in music and theatre studies. In music, excellent teaching and outstanding opportunities for practical music result in excellent achievement and standards that are well above average. In theatre studies, excellent teaching and support enable students to make outstanding progress.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	Not inspected in the sixth form.
Business	Not inspected in the sixth form.
Health and social care	Not inspected in the sixth form.
General education	Not inspected in the sixth form.

The curriculum areas are broadly common across all post-16 education and training. They do not necessarily correspond with subjects and courses taught by the school. Inspectors make judgements in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement 'outstanding' in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to 'very weak'.

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Students receive excellent support and guidance from their teachers, who know them exceptionally well and who scrupulously keep track of the progress they are making. Students know exactly how well they are doing and are given very good guidance on how to improve, including invaluable help from individual interviews. Students receive first-rate support with their higher education applications. They benefit from the exceptionally wide range of opportunities to take on responsibility and to broaden their experience by taking part in activities in the local community.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is very well led and managed. An already highly successful sixth form has continued to improve, with the leadership of the school enabling students to benefit from an exceptionally high and consistent standard of teaching and a curriculum that is ideally suited to the students' needs and aspirations.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are exceptionally positive about the sixth form and the support they receive. They are particularly appreciative of the extremely high quality of teaching and of the support and guidance that they receive.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY STUDENTS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards are very high at the end of Years 9 and 11 and in the sixth form. They have improved significantly even on the very high standards reported in the last inspection. The girls' achievement is very good by the end of Year 9 and excellent in Year 11 and in the sixth form. Achievement is excellent, overall.

Main strengths

- Examination results are very high
- The girls achieve exceptionally well and consistently across a very wide range of subjects
- Standards and achievement in the sixth form are excellent

Commentary

Standards in national tests at the end of Year 9 – average point scores in 2004

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	N/a (41.3)	N/a (33.4)
mathematics	N/a (47.5)	N/a (35.4)
science	N/a (43.0)	N/a (33.6)

There were 127 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

1. The table above shows the average point scores attained by students in the national tests in English, mathematics and science at the end of Year 9. Each point is roughly equivalent to one term's progress, so the table shows, for example, that in 2003, girls at King Edward VI Handsworth had, on average, made about two and a half years' better progress in English, mathematics and science than students nationally. The school's test scores are among the top 5 per cent of schools nationally. Official data was not available at the time of the inspection to allow comparisons to be made with results nationally for the tests taken in 2004.
2. Inspectors judge achievement by looking at the progress pupils make in lessons and throughout their time in school. Even taking account of the girls' very high prior attainment when they join the school at the start of Year 7, their Year 9 test scores and the consistently high and very high standards attained in other subjects represent very good achievement. Their current work shows similarly very high standards in Year 9 in English, mathematics, geography, history, religious education and music. Standards are high (well above average) in science, information and communication technology (ICT), French, German, art, design technology, physical education and dance. In citizenship, which is taught within other subjects, standards are above average.
3. Standards at GCSE in Year 11 are also exceptionally high. There has been still further improvement in the already very high standards reported in the last inspection, with the girls achieving excellent grades, placing them in the top 5 per cent of schools. The table below shows the school's GCSE results in comparison with the national average. At GCSE (and at A-level) *average point scores* have different meanings to that used in the Year 9 national tests. Average point scores at GCSE are calculated by allocating a numerical value to a GCSE grade, so that a pass at G grade is worth 16 points, while a pass at A* is worth 58 points. This system of calculation, which also incorporates corresponding values for vocational courses, is new this year, so comparisons on this basis are not available for 2003.
4. Work seen in Year 11 shows a similar picture of very high standards in English, French, German, mathematics, geography, history, religious education and music. Standards are well above average in

science, ICT, art, design technology and dance. In physical education and citizenship, standards are above average.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2004

	School results	National results
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	100 (98)	52 (52)
Percentage of students gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (98)	89 (88)
Percentage of students gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (98)	96 (96)
Average point score per student (best eight subjects)	423.2	282.8

There were 125 students in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

5. The girls join the school from a very wide range of ethnic backgrounds. All achieve exceptionally well, as do the very small number of girls who have special educational needs. A very high number (around one in three of the girls) comes from homes where English is not the first language but there are no girls at the school at an early stage of learning English. The girls who have learnt English as an additional language also achieve as well as the others in the school. King Edward VI Handsworth has a large number of girls who have been identified as being gifted and talented. Because the curriculum offers such a broad range of academic and performing arts opportunities, these girls' abilities are nurtured so that they too are helped to achieve their full potential.

Sixth form

Standards in GCE A/AS level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2004

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	99.1 (98.9)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	72.5 (67.7)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per student	445.0 (438.1)	265.2 (258.2)

There were 125 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

6. Achievement in the sixth form is excellent. In this inspection, inspectors looked in detail at only nine of the subjects taught in the sixth form, but other subjects were sampled. Standards, as represented in the students' AS and A-level results, and in the work seen, are consistently very high. The proportion of A grade passes has risen steadily since the last inspection. From work seen, in the subjects inspected in full, standards are very high in English literature, mathematics, physics, French, history, music and theatre studies. Standards are well above average in biology and chemistry.

Students' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

The girls' attitudes and behaviour are excellent. Their personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is also excellent. Attendance is excellent.

Main strengths

- The school is a stimulating environment in which to learn, so the girls are inspired to relish hard work and strive for success
- The girls respect and value highly the many different cultures represented in the school
- The girls mature into responsible, confident and caring young women as a result of the excellent provision for their personal development

Commentary

7. The girls at King Edward VI Handsworth are clearly proud of the school and of its achievements and reputation, regarding it as a privilege to attend. They praise its friendly atmosphere, take advantage of all that it has to offer, and appreciate the way that staff go the extra mile to help them achieve all they can, both academically and personally. Relationships among the girls, and between staff and the girls are excellent. The girls like and respect their teachers and acknowledge the well-founded trust given to them. They value greatly the wide range of cultures represented in the school. Staff and girls are united by a sense of common purpose, and aspirations of all are high. All this results in a purposeful and caring environment in which the girls aim to achieve their best, but also have time to enjoy themselves and broaden their horizons through the school's extensive range of activities.
8. From the outset of their time at the school the girls establish excellent work habits. They expect to study hard in lessons, and most teachers capitalise on this by making lessons stimulating, and encouraging them to take an active part. As a result, the girls are highly motivated, respond willingly to the challenging nature of the work and join in enthusiastically in class discussions. They are prepared to listen and learn from their teacher and from one another, and work very productively, both in groups and independently. From the start of Year 7, they quickly develop strong independent study skills.

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	332	1	0
White – Irish	15	1	0
White – any other White background	11	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	21	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	12	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	11	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	290	2	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	63	1	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	10	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	27	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	61	2	0
Black or Black British – African	2	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	6	1	0
Chinese	27	0	0
Any other ethnic group	19	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	10	0	0

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

9. The girls' behaviour is excellent. They act sensibly in corridors and around the school, with little overt supervision. They are unfailingly polite and welcoming to visitors and keen to talk about their studies and school life. Girls from all backgrounds mix exceptionally well together, and incidents of bullying or racial harassment are extremely rare. Girls reported to inspectors that any disagreements or problems were dealt with by the school efficiently and promptly, and teachers were very approachable. The number of exclusions is very low.
10. Overall, provision for the girls' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is excellent. There is a strong emphasis on the spiritual dimensions of life. Daily assemblies promote a sense of community and provide an uplifting start to the day. They are made interesting and relevant to the girls' lives and involve

thoughtful contributions from students and staff. During the week of the inspection, a number of students of all ages gave impressive and moving presentations to the school on their faiths and what these meant to them. They were listened to avidly, and warmly applauded. Work within some subjects, especially English, history, religious education, music and science, provides the girls with valuable opportunities for reflective thought. For example, in history, they reflect deeply on issues such as the Arab-Israeli conflict and the Holocaust.

11. Provision for the girls' moral and social development permeates the school. There is a powerful ethos which strongly supports and encourages the girls to become confident and independent and which at the same time promotes an environment where everyone is made to feel valued. One girl described the school as "*one big happy family*". There are also excellent opportunities for the girls to develop socially. In many lessons, staff encourage debate and discussion, giving the girls experience of listening and responding to others in a constructive and considered way.
12. Teachers and other adults at King Edward VI Handsworth provide very effective role models, demonstrating the value of hard work, respect for others and co-operation. This is reinforced through a wide variety of activities, including various forms of charitable work, participation in competitive sport and involvement in the wider community. Girls are given considerable responsibility and react very positively, for example in their roles as school councillors, form captains and charity representatives. The significant and highly successful charity work is further evidence of the school's commitment to the girls' moral and social awareness.
13. The school provides an excellent range of activities to promote cultural development. Language exchanges, theatre and gallery visits are part of the regular, rich diet of cultural activities on offer, in addition to the numerous musical ensembles and events that take place at the school. Other cultures are celebrated through events, such as the Samba music workshop for Year 7, and a 'Fame Academy Bollywood musical' which was organised in collaboration with a local Asian Arts project. Respect for different cultural traditions is apparent in colourful displays around the school, and in the way in which girls from diverse ethnic backgrounds are encouraged to speak to others about their cultures and faiths.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	2.6	School data	0.0
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

14. The attendance rate is outstanding. The school has first-rate systems for ensuring that the girls do not miss school, for example by actively discouraging families from taking holidays in term time. The girls are punctual, both in getting to school on time and in moving from class to class. The girls' excellent attendance contributes to their very high standards of achievement.
15. There has been very good maintenance of the very high standards reported in the last inspection. Attitudes, behaviour and moral and social development, all excellent at the time of the last inspection, have remained so, and there has been further improvement in the girls' spiritual and cultural development.

Sixth form

16. Sixth formers are enthusiastic about school. Their regular and punctual attendance reflects their desire to do well and contributes significantly to the high standards they achieve. By the time they join the sixth form, the girls have developed into self-assured, thoughtful and capable young adults, who are, in turn, excellent role models for the younger girls and splendid ambassadors for the school. The large number who decide to stay on demonstrates both their strong commitment to learning, and their well-placed confidence in the school. They are highly ambitious, setting themselves the highest standards and aiming to achieve the best possible examination results.
17. The students' conduct around the school is exemplary, and in lessons they are highly motivated, approaching their work with interest and showing a thirst for knowledge. Relationships throughout the sixth form are excellent. All sixth form students are encouraged and expected to take an active part in the school and wider community. They take their responsibilities seriously and are only too happy to be involved in any capacity, whether in mentoring younger girls, helping with extracurricular activities or arranging fundraising events.
18. Beyond the school, a great many undertake voluntary work in the community, for example in primary schools, nursing homes and charity shops. They demonstrate a very good understanding of the world around them and a concern to make things better, as shown in their support for charities such as

Action Aid. Over one third of the sixth form is involved in the *Young Enterprise* scheme and a significant number hold Duke of Edinburgh Awards. Each year, several girls take part in the senior bar mock trial competition held at Birmingham Crown Court. Their experience and horizons are extended further through cultural exchanges to Europe, and visits and expeditions by subject departments to places such as Honduras, Namibia, New York and Russia. Sixth formers recently took part in a *World Challenge* trip to Namibia.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is excellent. Teaching and learning are excellent, as is the curriculum. Students benefit from excellent guidance and welfare support, and the school has developed a very effective partnership with parents and excellent links with the local community.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are excellent. Assessment is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers are expert in their subject
- Lessons are extremely well planned, making very effective use of assessment information to help the girls build on what they have learnt before
- Work offers the girls a very high level of challenge appropriate to their ability
- Homework is used particularly effectively to reinforce and extend what has been learnt in class
- Relationships between staff and students are very strong and this helps to motivate the girls to work hard and do their best
- Teachers do not always give the girls enough opportunities to develop their own ideas

Commentary

- The table below shows the distribution of teaching grades for the 157 lessons seen. It represents a picture of excellent teaching overall. Teaching, judged as very good in the last inspection is even better than it was last time. The quality of teaching and learning is remarkably consistent across all of the subjects of the curriculum. It is at least good in every subject and it is very good or excellent in many. Teaching and learning are excellent throughout the school, although the proportion of very good and excellent lessons is even higher in the sixth form. In the questionnaire responses before the inspection, parents and the girls themselves were full of praise for the quality of teaching in the school.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 157 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
30 (19%)	59 (38%)	54 (34%)	14 (9%)	0	0	0

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

- Relationships throughout the school are exceptionally good. The girls get on extremely well with their teachers and they are eager to please them. This contributes to the excellent motivation of the girls, who routinely work with enthusiasm and sustained concentration. The girls are encouraged to develop strong independent learning skills and these help to prepare them for work in the sixth form and in their higher education.
- Teachers have considerable subject expertise. This enables them to answer authoritatively the girls' often probing questions. Through regular testing, they have a very clear appreciation of how well the students are doing and they make very effective use of this assessment information in planning lessons. As a result, the lesson planning is excellent because the lessons enable the students to build on what they have learnt previously. This contributes to the excellent progress that the girls make in

lessons. Very effective additional learning support caters equally well for the very small number of girls with special educational needs.

22. In most lessons, teachers start by outlining their objectives. In doing so, they are careful to ensure that these detail what it is that the girls are expected to learn rather than merely listing the tasks to be carried out. Often, but not always, the teacher returns to the learning objectives at the end of the lesson and involves the girls in determining for themselves whether or not they have been successfully achieved. Activities in lessons are varied, which helps to make the lessons interesting for the girls, and teachers make particularly effective use of time, so that the lessons have a brisk pace and the girls get a lot done. Teachers are usually careful to ensure that every girl is fully involved in the lesson, for example by directing questions at those who have been shy to volunteer answers. Homework is set regularly and is used particularly well throughout the school, both to reinforce and extend what has been learnt in class.
23. King Edward VI Handsworth caters for very able girls and it is a notable strength of lessons that they offer an exceptionally high level of challenge. Girls frequently undertake work that is more commonly seen undertaken by much older students. In English literature, for example, the girls study books in Years 7 to 9 that are more usually read at GCSE, and the GCSE books, in turn, are chosen from those more commonly seen at A-level.
24. In a small minority of nonetheless successful lessons, although the girls make at least satisfactory progress, they achieve less well than they do in other classes because the teacher talks too much and the girls are not given enough opportunities to develop their own thoughts and ideas.
25. Assessment is very good. Very effective use is made of the information from testing, together with ongoing assessment in lessons through the very skilful use of questioning. In addition, marking is generally of high quality. The school has recently revised its marking policy to focus increasingly on ensuring that the girls know what they need to do to further improve their work. Because the change is quite recent, it is still in a process of transition. As yet, girls do not always know precisely what they need to focus on in order to do better.

Sixth form

26. Almost every lesson in the sixth form was at least good, and around four out of five lessons were very good or excellent. In all of the subjects inspected, teaching and learning were judged to be very good or excellent. All of the strengths of teaching in the main school apply equally in the sixth form. Students expressed exceptionally favourable views on the quality of teaching and the helpfulness of assessment.

The curriculum

The curriculum is excellent with outstanding opportunities for enrichment. There is an exceptional match of staff to the needs of the curriculum. Other resources and accommodation are good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The curriculum is ideally matched to the needs and aspirations of the students
- The school offers an excellent array of extracurricular activities which are well supported by the pupils
- Pupils have wide ranging opportunities to practise their performing skills in dance, drama and music
- ICT is used well but it is not as well used as it could be because some opportunities are missed for using it as a tool for learning

Commentary

27. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection in the already high quality curriculum. Since the last inspection, the school has successfully bid for specialist status in performing arts. This has resulted in a review and enhancement of the curriculum. The curriculum team, of four senior managers, meets regularly to monitor the provision. Proposals for development are considered and, where appropriate, ratified by the Governing Body. The provision for personal,

social and health education (PSHE) is very good. The programmes are well mapped across all year groups. They cater very effectively for the girls' needs.

28. The breadth of curricular opportunities is excellent overall. In Years 7 to 9 it is very good. It meets statutory requirements and is extended to include dance and drama and to allow the pupils to study for a second modern foreign language. Additionally, students who come from non-English-speaking homes have the opportunity to study their community language. In Years 10 and 11, the curriculum is excellent. It provides exceptionally well for the girls' progression to further education and the sixth form. The curriculum meets the needs and aspirations of pupils who wish to follow an academic route.
29. Girls have equality of opportunity across all areas of the school's curriculum. Examples of how this manifests itself in lessons can be found in English, where girls are treated to a host of enrichment activities, and in music, where carefully incorporated tasks support learning. The use of ICT across the curriculum remains underdeveloped, particularly in English and history.
30. The range of extracurricular activities is excellent. Wide and diverse opportunities are provided to extend the curriculum. These are well attended. Students are permitted to establish extracurricular clubs of their choosing provided a teacher is willing to act in a supervisory role. An extensive programme of sporting activities provides many opportunities for pupils to take part in a range of individual as well as traditional team sports. There is a very good use of inter-house competitions in hockey, swimming, tennis and netball. These competitions are held during term time and show commitment to the development of sport. Pupils have every opportunity to develop their sport to the highest level. The girls have achieved success at county level in netball and hockey and have played rounders at a national level.
31. As befits the school's performing arts specialism, the girls are given the opportunity to appear in a wide range of school shows. This is particularly good as it raises self-confidence and provides opportunities to enhance their oracy skills. At the start of the spring term, staff and girls worked together to produce a pantomime. This ran for two nights at a local theatre. Following last year's successful production of *Grease*, the girls are currently rehearsing for *West Side Story*. These have been joint productions with a boys' school within the King Edward VI Foundation with which there are productive links. An outstanding range of music activities meets the needs of all pupils, including those who are musically gifted. Ensembles rehearse to very high standards and over 200 girls receive instrumental tuition.
32. The number, qualifications and experience of teaching staff are exceptionally well matched to the curriculum. Technician support is very good in design technology. In science, the technicians provide an excellent service. In ICT, the amount of technician support is only satisfactory because of the conflicting demands of departmental and whole school responsibilities. The language assistants provide an excellent enhancement to the languages curriculum. The match of support staff to the curriculum is very good overall.
33. Accommodation is generally good. It is very good in design technology, where suited rooms encourage a consistency of teaching approach and the sharing of ideas. The vibrant display in textiles results in a stimulating ambience which enhances learning. Lack of dedicated rooms for mathematics sometimes results in resources being unavailable. ICT accommodation is cramped, although computers have innovatively been sited in the corridors. Learning resources are generally good. The availability and age of computers is a problem that is an impediment to excellent achievement in science.

Sixth form

34. Students enter the sixth form in the expectation that most of them will move on to an academic course at university. The school offers a wide range of advanced level courses which provide a very effective bridge between GCSE studies and higher education. Rigorous systems are in place to ensure that the needs of individual students are accommodated. This includes initial pupil interviews in Year 11 to allow the school to determine its post-16 courses for the forthcoming year. At the start of the

following academic year, students have the opportunity to refine their choices. Within the constraints of financial viability, the course requirements of individual students are catered for very well. The subjects offered in the sixth form have teams of very well qualified teachers. The match of teachers to the curriculum is excellent.

35. As in the main school, extracurricular opportunities are excellent. Some, such as the Senior Dance Club, are supervised by students in Years 12 and 13. Some students go on to compete in sport at a national level. There is an excellent range of academically based extracurricular activities open to the students. These include monthly evening lectures at Birmingham University, the Physics Olympiad and opportunities for work experience overseas.
36. An exceptionally well-stocked careers room provides students with a very wide selection of brochures relating to specific careers and employment, and prospectuses for higher education courses. A programme of individual interviews and guidance continues throughout the sixth form, ensuring that students thoroughly consider alternatives, including non-graduate employment. Sixth form students participate in careers workshops, and are encouraged to attend higher education fairs and university open days and conferences. Imaginatively-planned subject-based sessions help Year 12 students to plan their university choices and applications. These sessions draw very effectively upon the practical experiences of Year 13 students who have already applied for similar courses. They explain, for example, that offers received can be quite different from those suggested in prospectuses.

Care, guidance and support

The support, care and guidance given to girls are excellent. Students feel their views are valued.

Main strengths

- The monitoring of academic progress and personal development are excellent
- Relationships throughout the school are very strong and the girls find the staff approachable
- There is excellent provision for the very small number of girls with special educational needs

Commentary

37. The girls are very positive about their relationships with the staff. They know their teachers well and are confident in approaching them for help in relation to both their academic and personal development. The school is very alert to the needs of the individual and offers very high levels of support and personal guidance. Girls are justified in saying that they feel safe at the school. The procedures for ensuring their health and safety are very good. The routine checking systems and risk assessments are carried out thoroughly and frequently. The implementation of child protection arrangements, under the direction of the headmistress, is excellent. Very effective support is drawn from a range of external agencies when needed. Overall, the very high standards of care make an excellent contribution to the school's exceptional ethos. Students are given a voice on school issues through an active school council and the girls feel that their views are strongly valued.
38. The school has highly effective systems for monitoring academic development. There is rigorous analysis of predicted and actual *National Curriculum* levels and GCSE grades. Regular assessments and bi-annual reports help pupils and parents to know how well they are doing and how they are progressing towards achieving their individual targets. Form tutors regularly review progress with individual girls. Where necessary, the school tackles concerns by giving mentoring support to students.
39. A very thoroughly planned and monitored progression of careers education begins in Year 7, initially built into form period and later in additional PSHE time. Pupils in all years learn systematically to evaluate their own skills and talents through a cohesive and increasingly personalised range of activities that encourage them to match themselves to appropriate careers. For example, in Year 8, the girls consider the demands of employment in schools and hospitals. Year 9 girls study child employment legislation and begin to use career identification computer packages. An external company contributes a drama performance on option choices, which is highly praised by pupils.

Year 10 girls undertake individual research and participate in Industry Day, having first completed risk assessments and identified relevant questions for employers. They gain a very good awareness of some of the realities of employment, for example how computers are used in designing packaging. A careers evening is held in Year 11 with a wide range of careers represented. At the end of Year 11, pupils complete two weeks of work experience, preceded by guidance on interview techniques. A database of involved employers is maintained, allowing pupils to track previous participants' experiences. Before entering the sixth form, all pupils are interviewed about their anticipated careers.

40. The very small number of girls with special educational needs are looked after exceptionally well. The school has been proactive in identifying the additional needs of girls who are not formally classified under the local education authority's guidance as having special educational needs but who nevertheless have potential barriers to learning. This includes girls with dyslexia and with physical impairment. Although the school receives no additional funding to provide extra support for these girls, high quality provision is made from within the school's general funds. The excellent support and guidance given to the girls with special educational needs contributes to their achievement being similar to that of the other girls at the school.
41. Since the last inspection, there has been very good improvement in arrangements for the care, welfare and support of pupils. The strengths of provision have been maintained and minor shortcomings previously identified have been remedied.

Sixth form

42. New girls are given an excellent introduction to the school, in which sixth formers play an important role. Sixth form managers are very supportive in assisting girls to make a successful transition from Year 11 to Year 12. Particular care is taken to ensure that students enrol on appropriate courses. Procedures to monitor the progress of the students throughout their sixth form career are excellent. Students are aware of how well they are doing and are given very good guidance on how to improve.
43. Arrangements for preparing girls for university entrance are excellent. All students receive advice that is tailored to their individual needs. For example, girls considering applying for places at Oxford or Cambridge or places at medical school are very well briefed on the particular entrance requirements of these institutions and the way that the application process should be approached. Students are also helped to prepare for life at university, with guidance on aspects such as the management of finance.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has very good links with parents, and excellent links with other schools and the community, all of which have a considerable impact on the girls' academic and personal development.

Main strengths

- The school makes considerable effort to work with and for the immediate and wider community, particularly through its support for teaching of the performing arts and sports and its charity work
- Parents are very supportive of the school and their daughter's learning at home, and the school keeps them very well informed about their daughter's progress

Commentary

44. This is a popular and heavily oversubscribed school with many girls travelling considerable distances to attend it. Parents hold the school in very high regard and ensure that their daughters attend regularly and are well turned out in the correct uniform. From the responses to the questionnaire, which a very high proportion returned before the inspection, it is clear that parents strongly believe the school is well led and managed and that their daughters are taught well and encouraged to become mature and independent. Parents cite the wide range of responsibilities, activities and events in school and the local community as examples of the opportunities the girls are given to help them develop into well-rounded adults. Parents show their support through their high attendance at school productions, sports events and parental consultations.

45. The school has developed strong relationships with parents and goes to great lengths to keep them informed and encourage them to be involved in their daughter's education. Written information for parents – including the prospectus, governors' annual report, GCSE and sixth form booklet for parents – is of a very high quality, detailed and well presented. A colourful termly, comprehensive newsletter *Spotlight*, and a performing arts newsletter, celebrate achievements and keep parents well informed of current developments and activities. Reports on girls' progress give a very clear picture of how individuals are progressing and what specific action they should take to do even better.
46. Since the last inspection, the school has maintained, and continued to develop, its exceptional links with the community. It capitalises on its proximity to the city, and location within the West Midlands, and organises frequent visits to local theatres, museums, art galleries and places of worship. Every year, the whole of Year 10 take part in Industry Day, which involves visits to local businesses and companies. The school attracts a wide range of visiting speakers and performers, and a large number of local organisations, including a gospel choir and the Children's University, regularly use the school's facilities. Girls also perform in concerts and productions at various venues in the city. Beyond the immediate community, the school has developed a successful partnership with a school in Germany and provides funding support for a school in Ghana.
47. Through its specialist status, the school works closely in partnership with a group of local primary schools, sharing resources and enhancing learning opportunities for the pupils. In order to develop teachers' skills in these schools, staff from the performing arts and physical education departments hold training sessions and workshops for primary school staff, and the local primary schools use many of the arts and sports facilities. The school also hosts a wide range of concerts and performances involving pupils from numerous local schools. There are strong links with the other secondary schools in the King Edward VI Foundation, including participation in various sports and arts activities, and the Foundation schools share a number of central administrative functions.

Sixth form

48. The senior girls, like those in Years 7 to 11, use the extensive community links to best advantage to promote their learning and personal development. A great many sixth formers undertake voluntary work in the community, or belong to local groups and organisations such as the Birmingham Orchestra. Girls enjoy well-developed links with businesses through their successful participation in the *Young Enterprise* scheme, and those taking business studies have appropriate contacts with local companies. Girls have become involved with students from other local schools, particularly others in the King Edward VI Foundation, and regularly collaborate with them in school concerts and productions. There are strong links with the local universities, with visits and speakers coming to the school, as well as participation in various competitions and events. All these links and partnerships prepare the girls very well for moving on to higher education.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

The leadership and management of the school are excellent. The headmistress provides excellent leadership and is very well supported by a strong leadership team. The management of the school is excellent. Governance is very good.

Main strengths

- The headmistress provides excellent leadership that is driving forward sustained school improvement
- Leadership of senior and middle managers is very effective
- Governors support the school very well
- Shared arrangements within the King Edward VI Foundation help to ensure efficiency

Commentary

49. The headmistress has given dedicated service to the school for many years. Although leading a very highly performing school, her extremely high aspirations cause her to strive to improve further. This is demonstrated, for example, by success in continuing to improve examination results from an

already very high level. The headmistress leads in a highly individual manner that exerts a very strong and highly effective influence upon the character of the school. Her contribution to education is widely recognised outside the school, within the Foundation and beyond.

50. The headmistress' vision is very well supported by other staff with key responsibilities. The senior team's high commitment and willingness to undertake additional responsibility and work flexibly have ensured that very effective leadership has been maintained in spite of the absence through illness of key members. Leadership has been highly successful in creating a happy school and an exceptionally positive climate for learning where all of the girls are made to feel valued and are helped to achieve their very best. An innovative approach towards providing a diverse learning environment in which all can prosper is demonstrated by the brave decision to undertake specialist status as a performing arts college. Though initially controversial among some parents who favoured the choice of a more ostensibly academic discipline, the choice of performing arts status has been highly effective in widening the perspectives of girls and teachers, while still maintaining very high academic achievement. The school's strategic development plan is a well thought out and useful guide towards improvement. The annual school development plan provides helpful questions for staff to ask when evaluating how successful they have been in reaching goals, although these are sometimes too general and do not always have measurable criteria.
51. The overall quality of leadership at middle levels is very good. The tutor teams are led in a manner that provides very effective academic and pastoral monitoring and guidance for the girls. Leadership of subjects and departments is very good overall. In some subjects, it is excellent. The school is aware of the relative weaknesses that exist in a small number of areas. It has, for example, taken steps to improve the leadership of citizenship.
52. The governors share the high commitment towards providing a successful academic education for girls who will benefit from this. Governors command a high level of educational, financial and other expertise that is frequently of great value to the school in ensuring that it derives best value through its planning and spending decisions. They do not intervene strongly in the day-to-day running of the school – having, for example, no formal links with subject departments – but this is not inappropriate given the school's long-standing and consistent record of achievement. Governors scrutinise all policies closely and require the headmistress and her leadership colleagues to justify all aims, plans and performance. There is a very well organised system of governors' committees to ensure that this takes place efficiently. The governors ensure that the school meets all of its statutory requirements. However, they have not ensured that ICT matches the strengths in other areas of provision, as opportunities are missed to use computers as a tool for learning in other subjects.
53. The school has highly effective systems for self-evaluation that allow it to accurately judge its effectiveness and identify ways in which it can be improved yet further. It is currently working to improve its systems further by increasing departmental capacity for self-evaluation and involving pupils. It compares its performance carefully, particularly with the other schools in the Foundation, with whom there is a healthy balance of co-operation and competition. These approaches have been highly effective in maintaining very high achievement. The school has been very successful in attracting capable, well-qualified staff, enabling it to ensure that all subjects are taught by specialists. New staff, including newly-qualified and experienced teachers and support staff, benefit from very well organised programmes for their induction and support.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	
Total income	4,252,864
Total expenditure	4,102,419
Expenditure per pupil	4,508

Balances (£)	
Balance from previous year	102,945
Balance carried forward to the next	253,390

54. Financial management is very good with some excellent features. Although the school benefits from more generous funding per pupil than average, it makes very good use of the funds it has. An example of this is the recent review of the cost of the sixth form that analysed income against the day-to-day and suggested longer-term expenditure. Additional support from within the school's own

resources is provided to girls identified by the school as having additional learning needs but who have not been formally classified as having special educational needs, and who therefore bring with them no additional funding for support.

55. A notable strength of the management of resources is the combined monitoring of financial expenditure between the King Edward VI Foundation and school governors. This is used very effectively to compare the impact of funding on standards of achievement between the different schools within the Foundation. With this information, school governors are very well placed to ensure that the school is efficiently run and continues to provide excellent value in the future. Since the last inspection, there has been very good maintenance of the very high standards of leadership and management of the school.

Sixth form

56. Leadership of the sixth form is characterised by a very strong commitment to the education of young women and the provision of opportunities that allows them to value themselves and achieve their full potential. To this end, the sixth form succeeds in its aims of providing a curriculum and learning environment that secure very high achievement, and general studies and enrichment programmes that allow all to widen their range of perspectives and experiences. There is pride that the ethnic diversity of the school is fully represented in the sixth form. Subject leadership is very good or excellent in all of the subjects that were the focus of inspection in the sixth form.
57. Procedures for self-evaluation provide a very clear understanding of the strengths of the sixth form and of how it could be improved further. Very effective liaison between the sixth form and those responsible for the other years ensures that the sixth form plays a full part in the life and success of the whole school. Highly effective procedures for setting and monitoring individual targets quickly identify and support any girls who might be at risk of underachieving.

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

Work-related learning

Provision in work related learning is good. Statutory requirements are met.

Main strengths

- The girls are offered very good visits which highlight a wide range of careers and which help to raise pupils' aspirations
- The provision for careers education is excellent

Commentary

58. Formal preparation of the pupils for the world of work starts in Year 7 and develops through to Year 9 in preparation for their choice of optional subjects. The school has formulated an effective policy on work-related learning. All girls in Year 11 have the opportunity to take part in two weeks of work experience. A carefully structured programme of well-matched information and advice precedes the girls being given responsibility for organising their placements. Girls who have been on work experience say that they were well prepared and able to reflect on their learning afterwards. An advisor from the local *Connexions* careers advisory service ensures that the girls are made aware of the diversity of local and national employment opportunities.
59. Given the ability of the girls, the courses offered at the school are academic (GCSE) rather than vocational, but a vocational ICT course (Applied GCSE) has been introduced in Year 10. All girls in Year 10 participate in an Industry Day supported by a range of employers. This experience is very good. Work seen on the Industry Day provided the girls with a high level of challenge and contributed to reinforcing their already high aspirations.
60. Work-related learning was not specifically inspected in the last report, but there has been good improvement in the quality of careers education since the last inspection.

Sixth form

61. The lunchtime activity of Young Enterprise serves well to provide experience of the demands of the business world. This opportunity is good and has a very high participation rate.

62. Students are provided with extensive guidance on university courses and the employment opportunities which might be suitable following graduation. For instance, students in Year 12 studying advanced mathematics attended a one-day conference at nearby Aston University. The focus of the event was careers for mathematicians and how the subject is used by industry.
63. In preparation for the real world, potential school prefects have to apply formally for the posts. This allows them to practise their application skills and interview techniques learnt as part of the personal, social and health education programme.

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 excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in national tests and at GCSE are very high
- Excellent teaching, teacher subject knowledge and clear learning objectives contribute to girls' very positive attitudes to learning
- Girls' enthusiasm contributes strongly to their learning and success
- Close monitoring of results has been used very well to improve the curriculum in Years 7 to 9 but the school's assessment policy is not yet applied consistently

Commentary

64. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE English and English Literature examinations have consistently been in the top five percent of all schools. In the Year 9 national tests, girls have tended to do better in the other core subjects of mathematics and science than in English. The school has already made appropriate changes to the curriculum to further raise attainment in English. GCSE results in English Literature improved in 2004 and were better than in English because all girls gained at least grade B, and more girls gained the highest A*/A grades.
65. Although girls enter school with very high standards, reading tests conducted in Year 7 indicate that there is considerable variation within each year group. As a result, work is now very well planned to develop critical reading skills. Girls in Year 8 talk knowledgeably about language used by Dickens to create an atmospheric first chapter in *Great Expectations*. They make very good progress and by Year 9 have excellent techniques for analysing literature because teachers prepare a wide range of increasingly complex tasks linked to high quality poems, plays and fiction. In letters written to the headmistress arguing that they should debate with politicians in Parliament, the most able girls show precision in their choice of vocabulary not often found at this age.
66. By the end of Year 11, girls make excellent progress. The more formal tone required for critical writing is introduced very well and textual evidence is integrated effectively into literature essays. A particular strength in the work of the most able girls is the opening paragraphs and conclusions that set out a personal response. All girls write with a clear sense of audience, although average ability girls sometimes repeat themselves in overlong explanations and relatively lower attaining girls use a narrower range of vocabulary. Very well prepared materials and well-structured homework help girls prepare coursework thoroughly. However, the range of work is similar for all. Girls bring such a lot to lessons, but not all teaching challenges them to think critically in discussions, for example in the use of false arguments for the sake of sustained debate.
67. Teaching and learning are excellent, overall. In all lessons, girls have very good concentration and work extremely hard to meet teachers' very high expectations. Teachers' enthusiasm for their subject is shared with classes. This is of particular benefit to girls who are gifted in this subject. In the best lessons, teaching builds on girls' knowledge through a range of stepped activities that develop their skills and confidence. Rather than answer girls' questions directly, some teaching draws on the expertise in the class and, through skilful questioning, it links and extends first thoughts. As a result, girls in Year 10 spoke eloquently about the conflicting emotions of cultural identity expressed by the poet in *Presents from my Aunts in Pakistan*, and Year 11 explain how Piggy is a clever boy but becomes a victim in *Lord of the Flies*. In a minority of lessons, girls are over-dependent on teachers' input and are not sufficiently encouraged to give detailed answers.

68. Leadership and management are very good. There is a very good ethos in the department and the expertise of new staff is valued. Management has a clear understanding of the need to ensure that all girls achieve their best, and that performance in English in the Year 9 tests is as good as it is in the other core subjects. The school's new assessment policy is not yet applied consistently in Years 7 to 9 so that girls know what they need to do to produce their best work before writing a final draft.
69. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Very high standards have been maintained, inconsistencies in teaching have been eliminated, and monitoring is used to identify strengths and areas for development. Girls' word processing skills are high, but opportunities to use ICT in lessons are restricted by the lack of computers in the English suite. The department places a high priority on reading for pleasure and works closely with the librarian and literacy co-ordinator to promote this. Girls also benefit from a wide range of visitors and visits to local and national theatres.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

70. Provision for teaching language and literacy across the curriculum is excellent. It is promoted at a high level in the school management team and not seen only as the responsibility of the English department. Girls enter school with very high literacy skills and standards of accuracy in written work are a very strong feature of many subjects. Girls' work is valued through high quality displays in the English department and elsewhere around the school. An impressive range of opportunities is planned for girls to research, read aloud, discuss and present their findings in many subjects and the best departments correct spelling and grammar. Speaking and listening skills are very well developed through peer and self-evaluation, role-play and group discussions in English, history and religious education. This enables girls to rehearse their ideas before writing. Extended writing tasks are included in mathematics, science, modern languages and geography. Very precise use of technical language means that girls write with confidence and accuracy in music and design technology.

French

Provision in French is excellent.

Main strengths

- Consistently very good teaching enables the girls to achieve very well and attain high standards
- Teachers plan exceptionally well together, sharing best practice

Commentary

71. Most girls join the school in Year 7 with very little previous knowledge or experience of French. Very quickly, they acquire sufficient skills to engage in everyday simple exchanges and to understand ordinary classroom instructions. By the end of Year 9, the girls attain well above average results in their teacher assessments. The 2004 GCSE results were also well above the national average. These results reflect the very high standards seen during the inspection week. As at the time of the last inspection, French does very well compared to other subjects in the school when it comes to the GCSE results. The proportion of students attaining the higher grades of A and B has increased, although the number of girls attaining the highest grade of A* has declined slightly in recent years.
72. As each girl progresses through the school, she makes very quick and significant gains in her knowledge of French. The result is that girls are able to engage in discussions using fairly complex sentences by Year 9. They understand native speakers of French and are able to respond accurately. They write short passages explaining their likes and dislikes, talking about their family and friends and responding to some challenging questions. By the time that they are in Year 10, they respond to teachers' fairly complex questions and engage in relatively sophisticated dialogues with each other. All through their five years, the girls achieve very well.
73. The main reason for this very good achievement is the consistently very good teaching that results in the girls learning very effectively. Teachers plan their lessons very well and structure them in such a way as to ensure that each student has grasped what is being learnt before moving on to build on it.

This is coupled with a variety of opportunities for learning that helps ensure that the girls maintain concentration and interest. Teachers support learning effectively by using very good questioning strategies. They also help the girls by explaining to them exactly what they need to do to improve their work further. Occasionally, there is a lack of sufficient opportunities for the girls to use French for longer chunks of time through pair and group work, although some outstanding teaching was seen in this area during which students used language with considerable sophistication.

74. A main reason why the teaching is invariably very good is the outstanding leadership and management of the department. Expectations are exceptionally high and best practice is modelled well. Teachers therefore have an agreed and common understanding of what constitutes effective teaching. They exchange good practice regularly within a happy and efficient department. Teaching is regularly and effectively monitored in order to build on improvements. The department also has a very clear understanding of examination requirements that is helping to further raise results. The extracurricular provision is very good. Improvements since the last inspection have been outstanding because all issues have been fully addressed, teaching and learning have improved significantly and because of the great improvement in the girls' overall progress.

German

Provision in German is excellent.

Main strengths

- The girls achieve very high standards because they benefit from excellent teaching
- The quality of teaching is of a consistently very high standard because the subject is so well led and managed
- Extracurricular activities, including visits, significantly enhance provision for the subject

Commentary

75. The girls in Year 7 have no previous experience of German. The teachers' enthusiasm for the subject, their varied teaching styles and the sheer enjoyment of the subject mean that the girls soon make significant progress. In Year 7, the girls are quickly able to talk about themselves and their families using whole sentences accurately. They quickly catch up with their listening and speaking skills in the way that they write and read. The result of all this is that girls attain well above average standards as measured in the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9. By the end of Year 11, their GCSE results are well above average. During the inspection week, these standards were reflected in the work seen in Years 7 to 9 and exceeded in Years 10 and 11, where standards are very high. Teachers focus specifically on enhancing the girls' examination techniques in order to ensure a further improvement in results.
76. All the lessons seen were at least very good with some being outstanding. Teachers are invariably well prepared for each lesson. They use effective questioning strategies to keep the girls working in such a way as to build on their previous knowledge. In one lesson seen in Year 7, the girls really enjoyed their learning through a quick series of activities some of which made them laugh a great deal whilst using descriptive sentences written on flashcards, on the board and on the overhead projector acetates. They were very keen to get the answers right and competed strenuously to emerge as the best in the class. Teachers use German all the time and do not allow the girls to respond in English. Prompts are used by the teachers as well as displayed around the rooms to ensure that the girls never use anything but German. This results in a happy and productive learning environment.
77. Leadership is outstanding. Teachers have a common view of what constitutes good teaching and they regularly exchange best practice. Teaching is monitored very effectively. The curriculum is enhanced further by a very good enrichment programme which includes visits to Germany. Improvements since the last inspection have been excellent, especially in the girls' achievement in all years and in their very high attainment in Years 10 and 11.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Years 9 and 11 are very high compared with the national averages for all schools because the teaching is very good
- The girls' attitude towards learning mathematics is outstanding and enhances their achievements and progress enormously
- The accommodation sometimes impedes learning
- Assessment is not yet used consistently to plan lessons and ensure the girls know what they need to do to improve their work

Commentary

78. GCSE examination results in 2004 and in every year since the last inspection were very high compared with the national average because the mathematics department has ensured that the girls acquire an exceptionally high level of competence, especially in algebra. The very good support provided for girls at risk of not performing above the national average adds very good value to their achievement. As a result, in 2004, every girl in Year 11 achieved A*-C and almost all attained A*-B at GCSE. There has been a very good trend of improvement in GCSE results since the last inspection.
79. Performance in the national tests in Year 9 have been similarly very high compared with the national average for all schools and well above the national average for grammar schools. The support provided for the school's mathematically least able ensures that they make very good progress. The inspection evidence shows that, as a result of changes to the curriculum following the 2004 tests, the number of girls in Years 7 to 9 who now have numeracy and thinking skills at the highest national level for their age is increasing significantly. In this highly culturally diverse school there is no difference in the achievement of girls from different ethnic backgrounds.
80. The attainment of girls on entering the school is very high. Work is pitched at levels that at least maintain their very high standards in Years 7 to 9 and accelerates achievement further in Years 10 and 11. The regular opportunity to talk and write about mathematics from Year 7 not only enhances girls' language and literacy competence but increasingly impacts on their ability to solve word problems. Furthermore, as the girls mature, it enables them to become increasingly efficient in making links between mathematical ideas, as problem-solving becomes more difficult and complex.
81. The quality of teaching is very good. Standards and achievement, particularly in algebra and shape and space, have risen because teachers use their very good subject knowledge and expertise to demonstrate effectively and explain new ideas with the aid of visually stimulating ICT. The pitch of the work provided shows teachers have high expectations of what the majority of girls can achieve and recent developments to the scheme of work have resulted in some teachers becoming more adept in a range of questioning techniques. However, on occasion, the quality of teaching is adversely affected by the accommodation. The long distance from the main mathematics area and relative weak resourcing of non-specialist rooms sometimes results in limiting the demonstration and explanation of new concepts. The very good practice of using assessment to inform the planning of future lessons and girls knowing how to improve, adopted by some teachers, has yet to be applied consistently across the department. As a result, in some lessons the mathematical needs of the most able and in particular the gifted and talented are not met as fully as they might otherwise be.
82. The quality of learning is excellent. Teachers provide a very good variety of learning experiences that are further enhanced by the girls' enthusiastic response to challenge. The girls question themselves and independently derive their own examples, particularly when undertaking GCSE coursework, to ensure their conclusions are valid. They collaborate with each other to share what they understand and acquire new skills and knowledge. Homework is completed well.
83. Leadership and management are very good and have led to a sustained improvement in the overall provision. Teachers are given very good support and the induction of inexperienced staff has been

effective in maintaining a highly cohesive team. As a result, the relatively inexperienced members of staff are making valuable contributions to the development of teaching and learning and the continuing improvement of standards. The leadership and management of the department provide an excellent role model for teaching and learning. Data is used well to monitor and accurately assess the progress of all students and develop the curriculum appropriately. Although there is a clear vision for future development, the associated plan is insufficiently rigorous in its definition of the methods and criteria that will be used to measure its impact on standards.

84. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Very high standards have been maintained, with GCSE performance improved still further. The proportion of good and better teaching has improved since the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

85. Very enthusiastic leadership has broadened the use of numeracy as part of the teaching and learning in other subjects. Governors have agreed a *Maths across the Curriculum* policy. Mathematical skills and concepts have been mapped across the curriculum and, as a result, changes have been made to the mathematics scheme of work and those of other subjects. Furthermore, girls have the school's development of mathematics outlined in the planners they take with them at all times. All teachers have a regularly updated list of girls who are currently struggling with the mathematics intended for their age group. These girls are further supported through the mentoring sessions provided at lunchtimes. Collectively, these measures have ensured levels of numeracy are high and have boosted standards among those girls who are mathematically the weakest in the school.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching contributes to the very high standards achieved
- Although some teachers promote independent learning very well, some are overly directive
- Arrangements for ensuring continuity between the different science subjects are informal

Commentary

86. Results in the Year 9 national tests have been consistently very high compared with schools nationally, although they have fluctuated around the average for grammar schools. At GCSE, results in 2004 were very high in double award science and in the separate subjects of biology, chemistry and physics, although the girls generally did less well in the latter three than they did in their other subjects.
87. Standards on entry to the school are very high. Achievement by Year 9 is good and, by Year 11, it is very good. Standards observed in lessons and in the work seen were well above average, reflecting the girls' excellent attitudes to work. Standards of both literacy and numeracy are well above average in their science work. Year 9 pupils write whimsically and at length about biological processes. The physics and chemistry courses are particularly strong in numerical calculation and symbolic manipulation. Year 10 pupils, for example, were quick to draw out the general formula for alkanes, having been introduced to a few examples. Coursework being done in the various science subjects is of a very high standard.
88. Teaching and learning are very good. The department is characterised by very good subject knowledge and by a number of teachers who have excellent presentational skills. In the best lessons, there is scope for independent work and this is a feature that students greatly value. It is most strongly associated with physics, where the build up is to an individualised A-level course and Year 11 pupils are well prepared for this. However, although independence is found to a degree in each of the sciences, some teachers are too directive. The girls do not achieve as well as they could when they are spoon-fed.

89. Most lessons begin with the communication of learning objectives. Many examples were observed of productive use of pupil self-assessment and of use of individual whiteboards to gauge class understanding as a whole. The best lessons have very good pace, with the girls getting through an unusually wide range of work in a 60-minute lesson. In general, good use is made of ICT, although the machines are now aging and there are occasional systems blips.
90. Leadership and management are good, overall. Teamwork is very good. New teachers are very appreciative about their inspiring role models. The departmental contribution to curriculum enrichment, to productive and exciting links with universities and scientific bodies, to revision support and to stimulus of visiting lectures adds up to excellence and contributes strongly to the high level of recruitment of girls to A-level science courses. Staff expertise is very good and the contribution of the team of technicians to teaching and learning as well as resourcing is also excellent. However, there is no clear mechanism for ensuring continuity between the different science subjects other than that provided by voluntary co-operation between the very well led subject departments. The school is currently using informal methods to check for continuity and progression in the course for Years 7 to 9. In general, there has been a reasonable attempt to institute new methodology, such as the national framework for teaching science in Years 7 to 9 and in developing assessment for learning, although the understanding of the latter varies somewhat from teacher to teacher.
91. Since the last inspection, there has been maintenance of the very high standards described. In addition there has been a partial implementation of strategies to improve teaching, learning and assessment. Improvement, although at a slower pace than in some other departments, is nonetheless good.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and lessons are well-planned to meet the needs of the pupils
- The girls are independent and co-operative learners, which ensures that they benefit from the good provision
- Opportunities for use of ICT across the curriculum are not sufficiently monitored and are inhibited by difficulty in accessing suitable resources
- The large size of classes in Years 7 to 9 reduces the effectiveness of the teaching

Commentary

92. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 indicate that student performance is well above that seen nationally. No students completed GCSE courses in 2004. The current Year 11 students will submit their coursework for the short course GCSE in 2005. They undertook the written paper in Year 10 in 2004, obtaining results that were well above average.
93. Students' skills at the start of Year 7 are well above average. Standards seen in lessons and in scrutiny of work were also consistently well above those seen nationally. All Year 9 girls commenced study for the double award GCSE this year. They use their very well developed research skills to identify accurately the components of ICT systems, for example. Very knowledgeable teachers devise effective open-ended activities and stimulating learning resources that enable students of all abilities to progress equally well. Achievement is good throughout Years 7 to 9. Well-supported and extensive use of project work in Years 10 and 11 leads to very good achievement. Year 10 database projects for the double award GCSE demonstrate well above average technical competence, combined with very careful design and very thorough testing and reporting.

94. Teachers deliver a well-planned programme of study. Very clear exposition, demonstration and guidance is founded on very good subject and assessment knowledge. The *National Strategy* for teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 has had a positive influence on all ICT teaching. Good questioning supports the girls' learning, and encourages them to challenge themselves so that they become effective independent learners. In a very good Year 8 lesson, the girls gained, through purposeful discussion, a good appreciation of the control of activities such as landing a plane in fog. Relationships between pupils and teachers are very good. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9. Because students are interested, co-operative and well-behaved, they learn well. This is despite over-large classes having a detrimental effect, making it impossible for teachers to respond quickly to all students waiting for help. Classes are smaller in Years 10 and 11, so that teaching is more effective. Very good teaching, in combination with students' very positive and mature attitudes, ensures very good learning. Teachers give valuable extra support daily in well-attended, open access sessions in the computer rooms before school and at lunchtime, also contributing very effectively to the girls' use of ICT in other subjects. Marking of pupils' projects is particularly constructive, but practices elsewhere are variable with no written feedback in some of the girls' books.
95. Overall, leadership and management are satisfactory. An effective teaching team has been created, with very knowledgeable leadership. The department functions smoothly on a day-to-day basis. The establishment of the double award GCSE is a positive innovation. Time pressures, including those of network management, have inhibited policy development, for example on literacy and numeracy within ICT, and the use of ICT across the curriculum. Some departmental documentation is comprehensive and very helpful, including some schemes of work. In other areas, there is little guidance for less experienced teachers. Whilst teachers have good informal knowledge of individual pupils' progress, there are no formal assessment mechanisms in place, so that systematic monitoring of performance data does not take place. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

96. The use of ICT as a tool for learning in other subjects is good, but it is not as good as it could be in relation to the generally high quality of provision in most other subjects. Although the use of ICT across the curriculum is not systematically monitored, overall competence of students in the use of ICT is well above average. For example, music students confidently compose and layer music, performing it using keyboards, monitors and mixing equipment. In art, students photograph and frame compositions, manipulating and layering images. Design technology and religious education students use ICT very effectively as a matter of routine in their research, it being an integrated part of the study. In English, students demonstrate above average word processing skills in producing brochures with a high quality professional finish. Opportunities for student use in other subjects, such as mathematics, science and geography are constrained by lack of access to suitable up-to-date resources.
97. Overall competence in the use of ICT to support study in the sixth form is well above average, although there is no discrete ICT course in the sixth form and no monitoring of ICT use or opportunity. Modern foreign language students use the Internet very effectively and extensively, for example in researching the cultural life of France and Germany. Drama students use digital cameras very competently, and work on lighting rigs and effects. In physics, in a highly ICT-based course, students produce very effective ICT presentations as part of their coursework. Mathematics students make very efficient use of graphical calculators when working on parametric equations, but access to other ICT equipment is too limited. Similar limitations affect biology students.

HUMANITIES

98. Geography, history and religious education were inspected in full. Geology was sampled. In a Year 11 **geology** lesson, the class learned about how sedimentary rock is formed and practised identifying different types. It was a good lesson because work was well selected to meet the learning objectives, with an effective balance between theoretical and practical activities. The girls were interested in the

topic and worked hard for most of the lesson, although levels of concentration and pace of work began to slacken during the practical task.

Geography

Provision in geography is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and very good attitudes lead to very good achievement in Years 7 to 9
- Although teaching and learning are good in Years 10 and 11, they do not always ensure that all girls are fully involved in their work
- Fieldwork makes a strong contribution to achievement

Commentary

99. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were very high in 2004. The 2004 GCSE results were also very high. However, the proportion of girls gaining A*/A grades was lower than in most other subjects. A higher proportion of girls took geography than in most schools, although numbers are lower in the present Years 10 and 11.
100. Most girls enter the school with very high standards in geography. By Year 9, the great majority achieve very well in maintaining this. Most have a very secure grasp of the geographical themes that they study. For example, they compare the patterns of imports and exports in the United Kingdom and Ecuador to draw conclusions about contrasts in the quality of life in each country. In this work, they confidently use charts and graphs to present and analyse information. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11, as standards remain very high, with all girls working at levels that match requirements for gaining A*-C grades, but a relatively low proportion are on target to attain A*/A grades. All students have a detailed knowledge and understanding of human and physical processes. This is shown, for example, in work referring to the effect of different types of waves to explain the formation of such coastal features as The Needles. For about half of pupils, though, understanding of how these processes interact is not yet thorough enough to meet requirements for A*/A grades. In all years, the general standard of literacy shown in written work is very high, with lucid, detailed, descriptions and explanations, and very well argued conclusions.
101. Teaching is good in all years. In most lessons, activities are well selected to provide interesting tasks that give effective opportunities for all to work at the levels that match their capability. The result is that pupils of all levels of ability achieve well. Teachers often use their good subject knowledge and understanding to pose questions that focus on key themes and require girls to think. In many lessons however, there is insufficient use of directed questions to ensure that all girls take part in discussions. Most lessons provide good opportunities for girls to improve their literacy skills by, for example, developing a specialist vocabulary and writing in different styles. In Year 7, for example, work on the earth's structure is used as a stimulus for imaginative writing on a journey to its centre. Teachers provide effective guidance to ensure that girls use charts and graphs effectively to present and analyse their information. They also promote the school's performing arts specialism whenever opportunities arise, for example in Year 9 role-play activities in which girls present economic and environmental arguments about the impact of human activities upon the earth's resources. Learning is good in Years 10 and 11. It is very good in Years 7 to 9 because of the response of girls in those years, which is generally very good and often excellent. In these years, they settle quickly to their work, listen very well to teachers and other girls and clearly enjoy the subject, sometimes showing great enthusiasm. Although attitudes are generally good in Years 10 and 11, girls are sometimes inattentive during whole-class work and teachers do not always correct this. Teachers do not always have high enough expectations of effort during individual tasks, allowing concentration and the pace of work to flag, so that achievement is lower at some times than at others.

102. The department is generally well organised to operate smoothly on a day-to-day basis. Good monitoring of teaching takes place. A well-qualified, experienced and cohesive leadership and teaching team have provided good improvement since the last inspection, mainly by maintaining previous strengths in teaching, achievement and standards. Fieldwork also remains a significant strength, having a strong impact upon the development of investigative and social skills. There is improved planning for ICT, which provides some good activities as, for example, when a Year 8 class used the internet to research extreme weather conditions. However, plans are not always implemented due to difficulty in gaining access to computers.

History

Provision in history is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent teaching encourages an expertise in historical disciplines and a love of the subject
- Pupils learn very well because they enjoy the challenge and the variety of tasks they are given
- Opportunities are missed for using ICT as a learning tool because there is not enough access to resources

Commentary

103. In both the teacher assessments in Year 9 and GCSE results in Year 11 in 2004, the girls attained standards that were very high. Standards seen during the inspection were similarly very high. Pupils do so well because lessons are planned across the key stages to cover the history skills of evaluation of sources, interpretation, making judgements and communication, both orally and in writing. Year 7 girls, having studied evidence including extracts from the Bayeux tapestry, established the events and weighed the relative advantages of the contenders, were challenged to write an essay on the reasons for the Norman Conquest. This work began a process in readiness for GCSE coursework for which extended writing on an aspect of the history of medicine is required. In all years, work is carefully marked for grammatical and spelling errors as well as giving individual advice for improvement.
104. Using a variety of teaching methods, pupils are challenged to think for themselves and ask probing questions. A Year 9 class had to categorise for themselves the causes of World War I. The girls listen generously to each other, allowing less able pupils to hear ideas rehearsed and repeated. Working in groups, Year 10 girls had to put together a bid for the 1936 Olympics as if by the government of Germany. This task required an understanding of both the nature of propaganda and of Nazi ideas. Girls had fun preparing the presentations and consolidated both their factual knowledge and how to express their ideas.
105. Books are plentiful and up-to-date. The already excellent opportunities for learning are enriched by local studies using the Domesday records for Birmingham and visiting nineteenth century back-to-back houses. Further afield, tours in Normandy and to the battlefields of Belgium create opportunities to access different forms of evidence and create enthusiasm for the subject. The girls' work shows good use of Internet sources and general ICT skills but opportunities to use ICT as a tool for learning are missed as the department lacks access to ICT resources.
106. At every stage, pupils benefit from having very good relations with their teachers who themselves form an outstanding resource for their pupils. The leadership and management of the department are excellent. Rigorous academic standards are maintained as is a focus on doing the best for every girl. Teachers work as a cohesive team willing to embrace new ideas and question present practice. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection.

Religious education

Provision in religious education is excellent.

Main strengths

- Academic results are particularly high and girls draw on their home cultures to enrich their learning

- The department is dedicated to responding to the needs of the girls as individuals in its provision for their spiritual and moral development
- The excellent leadership is reflective and strongly committed to the continual improvement of provision
- Schemes of work are imaginative and use a very good range of resources

Commentary

107. GCSE results are outstanding. Large numbers of girls choose the course. In 2004, all 75 candidates gained A* to C passes. Of these, 61 per cent were at A* grade, which was a higher proportion than in any other subject. Current standards are also very high. By the end of Year 9, girls have gained a substantial body of knowledge about Christianity and other major world religions. They know much about important beliefs and practices. For example, in Year 9, pupils studied marriage customs. They researched and presented the topic with very competent use of ICT, presenting their findings to the class using the *PowerPoint*TM program. Standards of speaking and writing are exceptionally high, and girls show exceptionally positive attitudes throughout the subject. They readily contribute to their work a wealth of information and insights from the wide range of religions and social backgrounds represented amongst the school population. Written work is substantial. It is very well organised and presented, where appropriate, with painstaking and imaginative illustrations.
108. By Year 11, girls have an excellent understanding of the academic aspects of the course. They understand the historical and moral aspects of the religious and social topics they study. Girls in Year 11 made conspicuous gains in understanding the workings of world trade through playing a game which revealed the inequality and unfairness that traditionally benefits richer and politically stronger countries.
109. Teaching is excellent. Teachers maintain friendly and constructive relationships with classes. As a result, girls are very keen to learn. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use a wide range of resources to impart knowledge and understanding of religious and moral ideas. Excellent planning ensures that time is used very productively, with a good range of teaching methods employed to maintain interest and consolidate achievement. Where required, girls work with an impressive degree of independence. Class discussions are of a very high standard. The department is dedicated to fostering and responding to the girls' needs as individuals. As a result, lessons provide a supportive environment in which all girls can confidently venture ideas and views. Teachers involve all, and not just the more extrovert, in discussions.
110. Leadership and management are excellent. Leadership is reflective, and schemes of work and methods of presentation continually evolve in the light of experience. The specialist teachers work together very productively to refine and share good practice. The schemes of work are imaginative and suitably challenging for the very able girls who study the subject. This was particularly well illustrated in Year 7, where girls studied in depth the symbolism and images used in the representation of Jesus in Renaissance and modern religious art. Planning includes significant aspects of citizenship. Overall, religious education makes an excellent contribution to girls' spiritual, moral social and cultural development. Standards have remained very high since the last inspection. Schemes of work and teaching methods have developed substantially and teaching is consistently of a very high standard. Overall, improvement since the last inspection has been excellent.

TECHNOLOGY

Design technology

Provision in design technology is very good.

Main strengths

- The teachers work closely with the pupils in lessons providing very good one-to-one tuition and ensuring that all pupils learn and achieve very well

- The assessment procedures include a very good element of self-evaluation
- Very good teaching stimulates the pupils' interest and raises standards

Commentary

111. Standards at GCSE in the 2004 examinations were significantly above average. Seventy three girls were entered for the examination. Almost all passed with grades A*-C and two thirds gained the top grades of A*/A. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 are also well above average.
112. Pupils join the school with standards in line with national expectations. By the end of Year 9, standards are well above national averages. In Years 10 and 11, girls have the opportunity to study courses in food technology and textiles. By the end of Year 11, standards seen in both of these courses are well above average. This represents very good achievement. By the end of Year 9, girls design and make products of a high standard in resistant materials, food and textiles. By the end of Year 11, girls on the food course design and prepare menus catering for specific dietary needs. Those studying textiles create imaginative garments to wear.
113. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. The girls enjoy all aspects of the subject and this was evident from the way in which they hurried to their lessons and enthusiastically set about their work. Teachers ensure that the area is vibrant and interesting. They have developed good working relationships with the pupils. This means that there is a genial atmosphere in the lessons and that the classrooms are pleasant places in which to learn. Teachers provide a high level of individual support and guidance for the girls. This ensures that girls of all abilities learn and achieve very well.
114. Planning, control and organisation of learning are very good in most lessons. For instance, in a Year 11 food technology lesson, the teacher planned for a wide range of practical and theory activities. Some girls were cooking, others completing their folders, and another group performed evaluation exercises. This variety of activity ensured that the individual needs of the pupils were catered for and improved understanding.
115. The girls understand what the examinations will demand, although they do not all know their target grades or the level at which they are working. Pupils regularly self-evaluate their work and do so well. Teachers add helpful comments to the self-evaluation forms and discuss these with the pupil. These self-assessment procedures are very good and are raising standards. Even though the girls do not know their expected grades, they are aware of exactly what they need to do to improve their work.
116. Where lessons are most effective, teachers share what is expected to be learned with pupils. They ensure that lessons have a brisk pace, have good technical knowledge of their subject and use a range of teaching styles. Those girls who opt for the subject in Years 10 and 11 are well drilled to complete practical activities in the lessons.
117. The focus of the department is clearly on improving the provision. The teachers work well as a team and are mutually supportive. They meet regularly to exchange ideas and to ensure consistency of approach. The leadership and management of technology are very good. Since the last inspection, standards that are well above average have been maintained. The curriculum provision in Years 10 and 11 has been reduced, however, and the girls now have a choice restricted to food or textiles. Overall, there has been good improvement since the last inspection.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

Provision in art and design is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are very high, with over half the girls gaining A* grades
- The girls' excellent attitudes and their desire to succeed are significant factors in their very good achievement
- Leadership and management have not been sufficiently rigorous in tackling the inconsistencies in teaching and learning identified in the last inspection report

Commentary

118. The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2004 were well above those reported nationally, with significant numbers of girls assessed at the highest levels. The GCSE results for the same year were very high, with half of those entered attaining the A* grades. Girls achieved at least as well in their art examinations as they did in their other subjects. In recent years, achievement has been inconsistent, however, and occasionally out-of-step with the girls' predicted results.
119. In the lessons seen, standards in Year 9 were well above expectation and girls achieved very well. Most join the school with quite limited prior experience of art and design. The work in their sketchbooks and portfolios highlights the rapid improvement that takes place as the girls move up the school. Some excellent work was seen, for example in Year 9, where girls worked on large-scale compositions from still-life arrangements. They showed their deepening understanding of positive and negative space and handling of mixed media to achieve the required tonal and spatial effects. Standards and achievement were raised because the teacher's skilful questioning helped students reflect on and explain their decision-making and thereby gain a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences between their own work and the work of the artists they had studied. Standards in current GCSE groups are well above average and overall achievement is very good. The strength of the work lies in the quality of preparation and in the depth of research and investigation seen in most sketchbooks. A weaker aspect of current work is in the way this is developed and realised in larger scale drawings and paintings. This work does not always demonstrate the same intellectual depth and quality of sustained painting and drawing that is reflected in sketchbooks.
120. Teaching and learning are good overall, with examples seen of outstanding, good and satisfactory teaching. The outstanding teaching is characterised by excellent planning, very high expectations and clearly explained objectives for learning. Where teaching is not so sharply focussed and well-planned, the girls' excellent attitudes and their desire to do well are a major contribution to their learning. Teachers have a range of excellent specialist skills, used to great advantage in developing, for example, the girls' use of digital media, work with a range of different print techniques and for three-dimensional work. Designing costumes and stage sets for school productions has been a feature of the strong and very successful collaboration between art and design and the performing arts subjects.
121. As at the time of the last report, there are some inconsistencies in teachers' expectations. Research tasks do not always mirror the academic potential of the most able girls by, for example, analysing information from different sources and presenting cogently argued views and opinions. Not enough use is made of *National Curriculum* levels, by teachers to plan work that reflects the highest levels and by the students themselves to monitor their progress.
122. Leadership and management are satisfactory but there are some significant strengths. Standards in GCSE examinations, although variable in recent years, improved in 2004. The department provides very good support for student teachers and there are excellent extracurricular activities and visits. The curriculum supports pupils' wider learning, for example in citizenship, and contributes much to the girls' spiritual, moral and cultural development. The weaker aspects are concerned with the rigor and purposefulness of analysing and then acting on the aspects that will secure consistency in teaching, learning and achievement. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.

Dance

Provision in dance is very good.

Main strengths

- The girls achieve very well because they benefit from very good teaching
- Those taking the GCSE in Year 10 attain very good grades
- The girls' excellent attitudes contribute to very good learning

Commentary

123. Dance is taught to all pupils in Years 7 to 9 and is offered as a GCSE in Year 10, studied in one year as an additional curriculum course. The numbers taking GCSE in 2004 are too few to compare with national benchmarks, but all of the students entered attained A or B grades.
124. Most pupils join Year 7 with average standards in dance. Because of very good teaching and the girls' excellent attitudes to learning by the end of Year 9 they have attained well above average levels. By Year 9, because of teachers' high expectations and focus on technical development, girls have a good grasp of the GCSE requirements and plan a motif using a range of dance styles. In Year 10, girls studying for the GCSE understand how to use contrasting natural images to plan choreography. They use hot-step, clap with rhythm variations and complete complex transition moves involving canon and unison. They know how body orientation is important when planning a motif. They are competent with dynamic change and the use of space when designing a routine. Overall, students make very good progress, their standards are well above average and achievement is very good.
125. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9, and excellent teaching was seen in the GCSE class. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and high expectations of students. This helps in planning activities which build movement skills linked to music. Teachers structure lessons very well so they have a very good starter activity linked to a warm up followed by a step-by-step approach in which students learn complex routines very well. Teachers make very good use of video technology to provide stimulus in Years 7 to 9 and to demonstrate professional choreography for girls studying GCSE in Year 10, who also benefit from attending extracurricular visits to professional dance productions. The new dance studio provides a stimulus to the girls as this helps create a positive environment for learning. Pupils' learning develops through participation at the very good range of extracurricular dance sessions and school productions. Where a girl has outstanding individual talent, teachers will direct them to local production companies.
126. Leadership and management are good and there is a clear vision for the future which focuses on the further expansion of extracurricular dance activities. Targets for development are planned properly, with suitable progress checks. The dance curriculum is being revised, with plans to offer dance GCSE in the Year 9 option system in the next academic year. All staff make an effective contribution to the department, they have professional evaluation of their progress and attend training courses to help improve teaching and learning. Sixth form students help in the running of lunchtime dance classes. Because of good and effective management, all staff are aware of their responsibilities and the subject runs smoothly.

Drama

Provision in drama is excellent.

Main strengths

- Excellent teaching leads to very high levels of achievement
- The girls enjoy the subject and are enthusiastic learners
- The subject is supplemented by a very good range of extracurricular activities

Commentary

127. This is the first full year that drama has been added to the curriculum as part of the school's performing arts status, although a small group of girls took GCSE examinations in drama last year in Year 10 having followed an after-school course over just two terms. All attained A*-C grades and around a third achieved A* or A grades. The standard of work seen in the group of girls taking the accelerated course in the current Year 10 was very high.
128. Teaching and learning are excellent. In the small number of lessons seen – all that were timetabled during the week of the inspection – there was excellent achievement across the ability range because inspirational

teaching imparted secure subject knowledge to girls so they were able to watch avidly while others performed. The girls are keen to learn and make constructive suggestions on how to improve. As a result, Year 8 girls produce well thought out and polished performances of stylised theatre based on an interpretation of Picasso's *Guernica*. Year 10 girls use their knowledge of facial expressions, body language and posture very well to create exaggerated character signatures for their work on theatre in education. They incorporate freeze frame and slow motion techniques effectively to improve symmetry of movement in a silent movie sequence. This represents excellent achievement over the short period of time that the subject has been taught at examination level.

129. Leadership and management of the subject are excellent. The curriculum is very well planned to support students with a range of performance skills in their study of a new subject, and to incorporate ICT facilities in the very well equipped studio. Research, writing and literacy skills are effectively incorporated into lessons and this is evident in the very high quality and presentation of work in older girls' folders. Gifted and talented students are encouraged to use their technical and creative skills in lessons because teaching gives them responsibility for their own learning. Girls' enthusiasm for the subject is evident in the popularity of drama clubs that are run by sixth form students and participation in the many theatre visits organised as extracurricular activities.

Music

Provision in music is excellent.

Main strengths

- Girls' achievement is excellent over a wide range of musical activities
- Schemes of work contain an excellent mix of practical experiences and theoretical knowledge
- Teachers use their wide range of performing skills to very good effect
- Extracurricular activities are very varied and encourage outstanding social and cultural development

Commentary

130. GCSE results in 2004 were very high. All of the candidates gained A* to C passes, most achieving an A* or A grade. Girls join the school with standards that are well above the national average. Results of the 2004 teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 indicated that standards were very high, as is the case in the current Year 9.
131. Pupils confidently compose, for example, in Blues style. Performing skills are well above average and girls improvise imaginatively as a means of developing fluency in composing. They analyse accurately music they hear. Pupils' knowledge of notation and chords is developed through its use in rewarding creative tasks. Literacy is very well developed through the use of precise musical terminology and through research tasks, such as the discovering the musical influences on Bill Haley. Girls' achievement in relation to their starting point is excellent. GCSE candidates have advanced performing skills, show a very good grasp of style and structure in their composing, and are knowledgeable about a wide range of musical genres and eras.
132. The standard of teaching is excellent. Teachers are versatile and use their advanced performing and communication skills to very good effect and ensure that pupils gain musical fulfilment and fun from the tasks they undertake. Teachers maintain exceptionally productive working relationships with the girls and, because of their skills and commitment, provide very effective role models. This leads to excellent learning. Girls tackle all tasks with vigour and enjoyment. Lesson planning is extremely thorough and all tasks are carefully designed to provide a meaningful musical experience for pupils over the range of ability represented. Talented pupils are very well challenged. Lessons begin with invigorating starter activities, such as rhythmic clapping exercises, that focus girls' attention while developing skills relevant to the main tasks. Composing and performing tasks provide excellent opportunities for girls to work independently and in small groups. Staff have very high expectations of the girls' commitment, and the judicious allocation of time to tasks ensures that lessons proceed briskly. A good range of activities within a lesson maintains girls' interest very well. Girls are encouraged to be constructively self-critical by evaluating their work against challenging criteria. Teachers provide valuable individual help that improves the quality of work in hand.
133. Leadership and management are excellent. Schemes of work fulfil statutory requirements and provide a wide range of worthwhile music experiences. ICT is being significantly developed as an aid to composing and

performing. Schemes of work are planned and refined in great detail. Resources are plentiful and of good quality.

134. Excellent extracurricular provision enables girls to further their interests and provides them with outstanding opportunities for social and cultural development. The wide range of ensembles includes chamber music, orchestras and choirs. Provision encompasses various of the world cultures represented in the school. Regular performances are given in the school and the city. King Edward VI Handsworth girls contribute significantly to the youth ensembles for which there is competitive entry in the local education authority.
135. Amongst the excellent improvements since the last inspection are the increased use of ICT, newly devised schemes of work of very high quality and increased numbers taking academic music. The scope of music has been further increased following the recent award of performing arts college status.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The girls achieve well because the teaching is good
- The school benefits from high quality sports facilities
- Activities are not always planned to help the least able to benefit fully from the lesson

Commentary

136. Nineteen girls took the GCSE short course in physical education. Their results were above average. All achieved a pass at grade A*-C and almost two thirds attained an A* or A grade. In Year 9, teacher assessments showed standards were above average.
137. Most girls enter Year 7 with average levels of attainment. However, because of good teaching, by the end of Years 9 and 11, they have developed a wide range of skills and abilities to an above average standard. In Year 7, pupils have a good understanding of gymnastic movements and are beginning to develop techniques for linking these together. By Year 9, because of teachers' emphasis on technical development, girls routinely use these skills in lessons. In netball, Year 9 girls have good ball-handling and footwork skills when moving at pace. By Year 11, they combine these skills and use the centre pass and good communication as an effective tactic. Girls in all years are competent at evaluating their work and make suggestions about how they can improve. They know the benefits to health and fitness of regular exercise. Girls make good progress in Years 7 to 9 and in Years 10 and 11 in all aspects of physical education and achieve well throughout the school.
138. Overall, teaching and learning are good. All teaching seen was satisfactory or better. In the best lessons, teachers' high expectations lead to pupils responding to challenges to raise the level of their performances. This leads to fast pace in netball, front and reverse stick control in hockey, and correct dig and volley technique in volleyball. The girls have excellent attitudes to their studies. They are extremely well motivated during lessons. They are eager to participate and are well turned out. Lessons are consistent in organisation. Each has an introduction so the girls all know what is to be covered and key words are used to reinforce physical education terminology and to help literacy development, for example, in badminton, for describing the overhead clear and smash shots, and in describing muscle groups during warm-up activities. At times, however, activities are not planned to enable the least able to fully benefit from the lessons. Teachers remind girls during lessons about the objectives, so focus is maintained and teachers check understanding at the end of each lesson. Teachers use video clips to clarify teaching points and this leads to students focusing on advanced techniques. Inter-house tournaments provide a good opportunity for students to improve their skills in competitive matches. The good curriculum means that students have many opportunities to develop skills and talents.
139. The inside and outside accommodation is of a high standard. In particular, the new sports hall and dance studio contribute to creating a good learning environment. The good maintenance of the

pitches helps teaching and learning. Girls learn about their strengths and weaknesses through ongoing evaluation of their performances, with fellow pupils and teachers. Where a girl has an individual talent, teachers direct them to external clubs and make sure they are developed through district, county and national sports organisations.

140. The school's senior management provides good support in helping develop school sport through the commitment to inter-house competitions. Leadership is good and there is a clear vision for the future which focuses on the expansion of extracurricular sport activities. Targets for development are planned properly with suitable progress checks. All staff make an effective contribution to the department. They have professional evaluation of their progress and attend training courses to help improve teaching and learning. Because of good and effective management, all staff are aware of their responsibilities and the department runs smoothly. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

141. There are no vocational courses taught at the school.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Girls have a good awareness of citizenship and community issues
- Citizenship is successfully promoted through extracurricular activities and assemblies
- In the absence of a subject coordinator, there is insufficient formal monitoring or evaluation of the effectiveness of the contribution to citizenship teaching made by subject departments

Commentary

142. Citizenship is taught through other subjects across the curriculum and as part of the personal, social and health education programme. In addition, the school ensures that girls are involved in a variety of extracurricular activities and charity fundraising projects that promote an awareness of a range of external agencies working to support local, national and international communities. Each year the school sends teams to participate in the local Youth Parliament, the European Youth Forum and the national Mock Trials. The girls are particularly strong contributors to the latter, and, for the past two years, have won their regional heats to earn places in the national final. Every year, girls organise fundraising activities for *Children in Need* and *Comic Relief*. Other charities are supported in response to need. A recent non-uniform day held to support the Tsunami appeal, raised over £2,000. Assemblies are also designed to play a significant part in raising awareness of moral, social and ethical issues.
143. There are numerous posts of responsibility in the school, open to girls of all ages, which are decided upon democratically. Girls are actively involved in the democratic process through school council elections and regular mock parliamentary elections.
144. Standards of work seen in Years 7 to 11 are above average. Discussion with girls shows that they are developing a good awareness of their role as citizens in a global community. Overall, pupils show critical judgement of current issues and an awareness of others and their respective needs.
145. The school has carried out an audit to identify where and how subjects contribute to the teaching of citizenship. During the inspection week, where citizenship was integrated in subject lessons it was taught well. Because of illness, the subject has been without an overall leader, but the school is taking steps to appoint a new co-ordinator for September 2005. In the interim, the voluntary leadership of two senior teachers is providing a satisfactory focus. There is a commitment to improve provision, for example by more clearly identifying citizenship in schemes of work, and to provide a structured approach to the management of the subject. As yet, the monitoring and evaluation of cross-curricular provision is not well established, but there are strengths in reporting.

Girls complete a well-designed self-assessment summarising the knowledge and skills they have developed and their personal contribution to the community in a statement for their annual report. The school aims for girls to record their day-to-day experiences of citizenship in their record of achievement diaries. However, in practice there are inconsistencies between departments in the rigour they accord to this task. Inspectors are unable to judge improvement in citizenship because the subject was not reported on in the last inspection.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2004, which is the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	2	100.0	82.8	50.0	25.4	45.0	31.2
Biology	9	100.0	65.7	55.6	10.8	44.4	20.6
Business studies	8	100.0	75.5	50.0	16.3	46.3	26.2
Chemistry	3	100.0	72.8	100.0	14.4	53.3	24.1
Dance	1	100.0	82.8	100.0	22.0	60.0	29.9
Drama	4	100.0	90.0	50.0	23.4	40.0	33.2
Economics	17	100.0	76.4	35.3	22.6	39.4	28.4
English literature	10	200.0	87.8	100.0	18.0	55.0	30.5
French	15	93.3	80.2	40.0	19.4	40.0	28.2
Design and technology	2	50.0	79.4	0.0	19.8	15.0	28.4
General studies	6	66.7	75.5	33.3	18.8	28.3	26.7
Geography	3	100.0	79.3	100.0	24.7	56.7	29.7
German	3	100.0	82.1	33.3	19.2	43.3	29.2
History	6	83.3	83.7	66.7	23.7	36.7	30.6
Mathematics	10	90.0	66.2	40.0	17.3	38.0	23.5
Music	1	100.0	83.2	0.0	20.2	20.0	29.5
Other science	14	92.9	69.7	71.4	16.9	47.9	24.2
Other social sciences	4	100.0	70.2	25.0	17.7	37.5	24.7
Physics	11	100.0	78.8	72.7	25.9	51.8	29.6
Religious studies	9	88.9	84.5	66.7	28.4	43.3	32.8

Level 3 GCE A level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	10	100.0	98.8	90.0	53.6	110.0	89.5
Biology	53	100.0	97.0	77.4	42.6	100.4	81.3
Business studies	5	100.0	99.1	40.0	42.1	84.0	83.2
Chemistry	58	100.0	98.2	72.4	52.4	96.6	87.5
Classical studies	1	100.0	99.7	100.0	62.0	120.0	94.5
Drama	7	100.0	99.7	28.6	45.6	80.0	86.8
Economics	5	80.0	99.1	60.0	58.6	72.0	92.5

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
English literature	41	100.0	99.4	92.7	44.7	111.7	85.5
French	11	100.0	99.1	81.8	53.0	101.8	89.0
Design and technology	5	100.0	98.9	100.0	43.1	108.0	83.6
General studies	121	100.0	95.7	52.9	31.6	90.6	74.2
Geography	13	100.0	99.1	100.0	52.9	110.8	89.1
German	3	100.0	98.7	100.0	49.3	100.0	86.5
History	12	100.0	99.0	75.0	48.8	100.0	86.9
Mathematics	57	100.0	97.3	87.7	58.4	107.4	90.9
Music	8	100.0	98.8	75.0	40.6	97.5	81.8
Other sciences	48	100.0	98.0	85.4	48.7	110.4	85.3
Other social studies	14	100.0	97.8	85.7	45.7	108.6	83.7
Physics	12	100.0	98.0	91.7	50.6	113.3	86.6
Religious studies	16	100.0	99.3	81.3	51.1	105.0	88.3

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

146. English literature and French were inspected in full. German was sampled. In the Year 13 **German** lesson seen, the quality of teaching was outstanding. The girls made outstanding progress and were able to use the language fluently and accurately. During this lesson, the girls were given opportunities to use German confidently. They were also able to draw on their extensive knowledge of German history to support their arguments. The teacher helped by giving students advice on how to improve even further.

English literature

Provision in English literature is excellent.

Main strengths

- Examination results are consistently well above the national average
- Teachers' high expectations, excellent subject knowledge and enthusiasm for literature enable students to learn very well
- Students reach very high standards in writing and handle the terminology of literary criticism very well
- Reading skills are very well developed in the interpretation and evaluation of a range of challenging texts

Commentary

147. AS and A2 level results in 2004 for English literature were high, with nearly two thirds of the girls gaining the highest grade at A2 level. Since 2001, all girls have gained at least grade B. English literature is a popular subject with very high retention and completion rates. Students are pleased with their subject choice and feel that it is good for their future plans. The needs of all groups and individual students are very well met in lessons. The girls' very positive responses make a significant contribution to their excellent achievement. The standard of work of current students is very high.
148. The structured approach to teaching literary criticism skills throughout the main school means that girls make rapid progress with their essay writing in Year 12. Students' files are very well organised with carefully prepared notes. Their independent research tends to rely on Internet information and not draw on the small but high quality collection of books in the library. There is challenge for the

most able students in the works selected for study. Teachers give discrete support to less confident girls through guidance on essay titles. Students enjoy the challenge of studying works of authors not easily accessible, such as Milton and Hawthorne. Students write with maturity and address the attainment objectives with confidence. Their writing shows detailed understanding of each text and incorporates critical vocabulary effectively to put forward a personal view.

149. Teaching, teachers' subject knowledge and their understanding of the examination requirements are excellent. There is prompt and constructive evaluation of students' ideas, both in discussions and writing. High quality questioning enables the teacher to become a facilitator for students to explore and explain, for example, the similarities and differences in opening speeches by Satan and Beelzebub in *Paradise Lost*. Students in a Year 13 lesson were encouraged to explore the feelings of characters in *Measure for Measure* through dramatic presentations, and this sharpened their interpretation of dialogue. A very good range of teaching strategies is used to encourage students to develop their thinking skills. It is evident in lessons, however, that students are reluctant to discuss their ideas in the detail that is found in their written work.
150. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. Staff are encouraged to teach to their expertise and their commitment and enthusiasm are evident to students. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good because teaching has focused on meeting requirements for the highest grades. Students enjoy taking part in a wide range of activities such as running the magazine, debates, helping support younger girls with their reading and other enrichment activities such as the recent trip to Venice. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

151. The approach to teaching language and literacy across the curriculum in the sixth form is an extension of the excellent provision in English in Years 12 and 13. Students voluntarily make precise notes in almost all lessons. Very effective work was seen in subjects such as English, mathematics, chemistry, French, history, music and theatre studies, where teachers expect students to acquire and use a high level of technical vocabulary in well prepared essays and presentations. There is very good development of communications skills in biology and physics where clear, well-balanced arguments are a strong feature of discussions and *PowerPoint*TM presentations.

French

Provision in French is excellent.

Main strengths

- Outstanding teaching enables the students to achieve very well
- Students respond exceptionally well to the high level of challenge in lessons
- The very high quality assessment ensures that students know what they need to do to improve their work

Commentary

152. In the 2004 AS examinations, the results were well above the national average. The A2 results were equally high, with a large number of students attaining the higher grades. These results are reflected in the very high standards seen during the inspection. The girls use French fluently and with considerable confidence. The standards of their spoken French are well above average. By the time that they are in Year 13, their use of French is sufficiently fluent to allow them to engage in complex discussions on such subjects as European agricultural policies and the far right in French politics. The girls' written work is largely free of common errors. They use complex sentences to describe and explain the subject that they are writing about.
153. The quality of teaching is outstanding. Teachers are invariably well prepared and they structure their lessons very carefully to allow students to build on previous knowledge. The result is that the girls keep reinforcing previous learning whilst extending their knowledge of the language. The teachers

treat the girls with considerable courtesy within a warm learning environment based on excellent relationships. This means that the girls are willing to listen to advice given and to act on it to their own benefit. Teachers provide many opportunities for ICT to be used effectively. The teachers' questioning strategies are such that students are able to follow even the most difficult subjects that may appear to bear no specific relevance to their own daily lives. They are willing to experiment in order to reach even higher standards of achievement. In one lesson, the students discussed the far right political scene in France in a way that showed a genuine deep understanding of French politics as well of their own empathy with anti-discriminatory measures. Gifted and talented girls are particularly adept at responding to high levels of challenge in the work set by teachers. There is occasionally a lack of depth in some girls' responses to some ideas being discussed although this improves significantly by Year 13.

154. The leadership of French is outstanding. There is an effective collegiate system whereby all teachers work closely and collaboratively. They are a mutually supportive group of professionals committed to giving the best support possible to the girls. The result is that French is constantly developing and the students are consistently making excellent progress. This is a very significant improvement on the last inspection when progress was judged to be good, whereas now it is outstanding. Teaching and learning are effectively monitored through an excellent programme of evaluation. As a result of a specific departmental policy, the girls are helped to learn examination techniques with evident impact on their examination successes. Assessment is excellent. As a result, students have a very good understanding of how to improve their work even further. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

MATHEMATICS

155. The inspection focused on AS and A2 examination courses. Provision for students sitting GCE further mathematics was sampled. One Year 12 **further mathematics** lesson was seen. The quality of teaching was very good with students responding very well and, because of this, making outstanding progress. The performance of the few students taking further mathematics has been very high, but in recent years the numbers of students has been too small to make meaningful comparisons with national averages.

Mathematics

Provision in mathematics is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high and students achieve very highly because they are exceptionally well motivated and very well taught
- Occasionally, the most able pupils have too little opportunity for independent work
- The subject is very well led and managed but there has not been enough rigour in determining why so many students drop the subject after their AS year

Commentary

156. Since the last inspection, examination results have been consistently very high compared with national averages. Standards in lessons are very high and show that for the vast majority of Year 12 and Year 13 students, achievement is very good. A significant proportion of Year 13 students, including the gifted and talented, expect to go to university and study courses with a high level of mathematical content, and the progress they make in the sixth form prepares them very well for their further studies.
157. The teaching is very good. Teachers have high expectations and use their very good subject knowledge and expertise to demonstrate effectively and explain new ideas with the aid of visually stimulating practical resources and ICT. This leads to students of all abilities being able to mathematically model real situations efficiently. Questioning techniques are very good and generate

intellectually stimulating discussions between teacher and students. However, on occasions, teachers in their desire to ensure all students understand new concepts, dominate the time available and are slow to initiate independent learning. This leads to the mathematical needs of the most able, and in particular the gifted and talented, not being met in some lessons.

158. Learning is excellent. The attitudes of students towards learning are admirable and enhance their progress and achievement. Samples of work show students' exceptional levels of application and productivity. Furthermore, students' willingness to take responsibility for their own learning ensures that lessons proceed at a very good pace. In Year 12, the independent use of note-taking and collaborative discussion ensured students quickly learnt to cope with the increased range of vocabulary and notation required to understand the way examination questions are expressed.
159. Leadership is excellent and management is very good. The way students are selected as AS mathematics and potentially A2 candidates ensures that a very high percentage of girls in Year 11 could apply. As a result, approximately half of them do. Leadership and management has been very effective in matching the expertise of staff to the needs of students and the curriculum. This has led to several members of staff attending training so curriculum change and development maintains the existing high standards. However, department self-evaluation is not sufficiently rigorous, especially when a high proportion of students decide not to continue onto A2 after successfully completing AS level in Year 12.
160. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. The department's participation in external training has been used to construct a well-designed curriculum and efficiently match staff to its demands. As a result, students' attainment and achievement have improved significantly since the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

161. Students' high level ability to use and apply mathematics enhances their attainment and achievement in other subjects, particularly biology, chemistry and physics. Balancing chemical equations and complex theories demand higher-level numeric and algebraic skills. Recent developments to the breadth of the A2 mathematics course have seen the inclusion of decision mathematics and an increase in the time devoted to statistics in response to the demands of other A2 courses chosen by the girls. Furthermore, within mathematics lessons, teachers ensure students identify any topic that cuts across different subject areas. As a result, a significant number of girls improve A2 assignments with the introduction of appropriate statistical measures. Examples of this skill were seen in samples of work undertaken in geography and business studies.

SCIENCE

162. Biology, chemistry and physics were inspected in detail. Psychology was sampled. In the **psychology** lesson seen, the students achieved very well because the teacher's probing questions helped them evaluate very effectively a video on different approaches to psychology. Standards in psychology are above average.

Biology

Provision in biology is very good.

Main strengths

- Excellent subject knowledge and a very good match of teachers to the curriculum contribute to very good teaching
- Teachers know the students very well and respond to their individual needs, giving additional support in and outside lessons
- Very good extracurricular opportunities extend the sixth from curriculum in biology

Commentary

163. Over the last few years, results in A2 biology have shown a marked improvement. Results in A2 compared with other schools were very high in 2004, with an increased number of higher grades compared to results in 2003.
164. The standards seen in lessons were well above the national average and achievement is high. Independent work is developing well and students enjoy this, working effectively in teams. They discuss topics very well, showing insight and a depth of understanding. Most students have well developed manipulative skills and embark on practical activities with purpose. They question the methodology of their experimental work, have good deductive skills and interpret data well. Students have a very sound perception of theoretical concepts. They show a very good understanding of the implications of structural adaptations of plants and animals and represent biological molecular structures with accuracy.
165. Teaching and learning are very good. The teachers plan their lessons very well, making lesson objectives very clear. They know the students well and respond to their individual needs, giving additional support within and outside lessons. They have excellent subject knowledge and a very detailed understanding of the examination board requirements, preparing students very well for theoretical and practical assessments. There is a very good match of teachers to the curriculum. In the best lessons, a good use of resources and a variety of activities stimulate the interest of students. In one lesson, a group of students produced an accurate presentation on the HIV and AIDS virus: cause, symptoms and links to the immune systems, which was delivered with confidence. Assessment is developing very well. This includes in-depth questioning during lessons and a good use of materials from previous examinations, which are carefully marked. Students appreciate the feedback on their essays, but would value more feedback on other homework. The use of ICT to support teaching and learning is developing, but lack of reliable systems and technical support limits its effectiveness.
166. Leadership and management are very good. A knowledgeable team of teachers works closely together and is deployed effectively. Enrichment activities are well managed and popular with students. Newly-qualified teachers are inspired and well supported by the very good role models within the biology department. A hard working team of technicians supports practical work well, often by contributing their technical expertise. Overall, resources and accommodation are good. One laboratory is particularly well equipped for working with micro-organisms. Students have access to suitable textbooks, but much of the ICT equipment available is approaching the end of its useful life. Enrichment activities are very good, with more able Year 13 students taking part in the British Biology Olympiad. In addition, teachers use their contacts with local universities to invite lecturers into the school during lunchtime sessions to supplement the sixth form syllabus. Standards have risen since the last inspection and improvement has been very good.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is very good.

Main strengths

- Very good student attitudes contribute to well above average attainment and very good achievement
- Expert knowledge and understanding of chemistry on the part of teachers, coupled with the ability to plan the subject matter well, lead to the very good learning
- The subject is enriched by very good links with outside bodies, including universities

Commentary

167. The subject is very popular. In 2004, results at AS were very high. At A2, three out of four candidates attained A or B grades, which is well above the national average.
168. Standards observed were similarly well above average. The course is very practical and develops students' laboratory skills very well. Year 12 students were able to work out the oxidation states of chromium, making very good use of knowledge and understanding gained in an earlier part of the

module (on Vanadium). Year 13 students were observed preparing for their practical examination with very good manipulative skills and well above average mathematical skills in the working out of standard solutions. Some students were better in writing than in talking, a general problem across subjects that has been identified by the school; but behaviour is excellent and attitudes to work and to the subject are very good – especially as expressed in co-operative work and laboratory skills. Achievement by Year 13 is very good.

169. Teaching is very good. It includes very strong chemical understanding and knowledge of examination board requirements. Assessment is very good, especially the development of techniques for assessing day-to-day learning, for example by pressing students to commit themselves to agreement or disagreement with a given answer. The teachers know the students very well and provide support both in and out of lessons. They provide a strong diet of explanation and class practical work, aided by very good teamwork and departmental role models.
170. Leadership and management are very good. There have been a number of recent changes of staff but teamwork remains a strong feature and the department is very well managed. The tracking of students' achievement is very good. Resources, staffing and accommodation are good, and the subject benefits from high quality technical support. Links with universities, the use of lectures, and competitions make a very good contribution to curriculum enrichment. Standards have risen since the last inspection and numbers remain very high for a science A2 level. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

Physics

Provision in physics is excellent.

Main strengths

- Excellent student attitudes contribute to very high attainment and very good achievement
- Teachers have particularly good knowledge and understanding of physics, coupled with the ability to make the subject matter exciting
- An individualised advanced level course leads to independent learning, a feature that is much valued by the students
- The subject is enriched by excellent links with outside bodies including universities

Commentary

171. In 2004, results at AS and at A2 levels were very high. At A2, nine out of every ten candidates attained A or B grades. The subject has been growing, but is not yet as popular as the other science subjects.
172. Standards observed were well above average. The department attracts a good number of GCSE A and A* students, most of whom attain A and B grades at A2 level. Their attitudes to the school, the subject and their work are all very positive. They are given very good opportunities to think for themselves and work independently. Literacy, numeracy and ICT skills are well above average and fully exercised by the project work at the centre of the course. Year 12 students are building up their repertoires of skills, for example through individual experiments on waves. Achievement by Year 13 is very good; the students are able to carry out individual experiments on radiation with very good skills, including use of computers.
173. Teaching is excellent. Teachers' expertise is very strong. Teachers' presentational skills are excellent, but the lessons are not teacher dominated because the course is very individualised and promotes the sort of independent research, both practical and textual, that prepares students very effectively for higher education. Assessment is very good, especially the supervision of project work. The teachers know the students very well and provide very effective support both in and out of lessons. The department makes very good use of ICT for teaching and for students' experiments, information research and presentation. Year 13 students have very high level ICT skills, for example,

in transferring data from a data logging program to *Excel*TM in order to smooth a radioactivity decay curve.

174. Leadership and management are very good. Tracking of achievement is good. There is a strong emphasis on school priorities, chiefly assessment at present. There is very good teamwork between the teachers, with the students and with the technician who makes an excellent contribution by helping students to use unfamiliar apparatus such as the cloud chamber and data logging equipment. Resources, staffing and accommodation are very good with very good use of physics journals. Links with universities, the use of lectures, competitions and equipment loans (such as liquid nitrogen) make an excellent contribution to curriculum enrichment. Both standards and numbers have risen since the previous inspection. Improvement since then has been very good.

HUMANITIES

175. History was inspected in detail. Geography, government and politics and religious education were sampled. One Year 12 **geography** lesson was observed. Teaching and learning were good with the girls achieving well. Standards in geography are well above average. The Year 12 **government and politics** lesson seen was very good, with the girls achieving very well. Standards in government and politics are well above average. One Year 12 **religious education** lesson was observed. Teaching was outstanding, with the girls being totally engrossed in their learning and making excellent progress.

History

Provision in history is excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The syllabus offered is well chosen because it builds on knowledge and skills learnt at GCSE and provides high academic challenge
- Teachers have high quality subject knowledge, examination expertise, and work together very effectively as a team
- Students and staff enjoy excellent relationship
- There are too few opportunities to benefit from the use of ICT

Commentary

176. The results of AS and A2 examinations in 2004 were well above average. The syllabus chosen, which includes a comparative investigation of revolutions in twentieth century Russia and seventeenth century England, makes good use of individual staff expertise and the department's uncompromising maintenance of high academic standards.
177. As Year 12 students readily acknowledged, the intellectual level of work had increased since GCSE but they feel well equipped to make progress based on the secure historical skills that they had gained by the end of their GCSE studies. Their success is ensured by teachers who use a variety of teaching methods to access the syllabus. Independent research formed the basis for paired work followed by group discussion in lessons on the attitude to reform of nineteenth century Russian Tsars and post Cold War détente. Group work, including reading aloud to aid understanding of seventeenth century texts, helped students to analyse the differences between various radical groups. Students' understanding was due to be consolidated in the form of a "reality show" scenario in which students take the part of representatives of each revolutionary group to give their views on a variety of issues. The individual study enables the students to follow up on personal interests, for example the rule of Mrs Ghandi in India or the reasons for the ending of the slave trade. Students receive excellent feedback in lessons and in particular on their written work, which is most carefully marked and extensively annotated.
178. The department is well resourced. Progress is excellent since the last inspection, as a productive mixture of new ideas and experience have been accessed to absorb ongoing curriculum changes yet maintain and improve on examination success.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

179. In this curriculum area, no subject was inspected in detail, but design and technology was sampled. In a Year 13 **design and technology** lesson, students learnt and achieved well because the teaching was good. Standards in design and technology are well above the national average.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

180. The focus of the inspection was on theatre studies and music. Art was sampled. In a Year 12 **art** lesson, the teaching was good, with the students making good progress as a result. Standards in art are above the national average.

Music

Provision in music is excellent.

Main strengths

- Students' achievement is excellent because their individual talents are catered for impressively
- Academic topics are enlivened by the use of high quality resources
- Teachers' musical versatility ensures that all aspects of provision are exceptionally good

Commentary

181. A-level results in 2004 were above average for girls nationally. Current standards are very high. Students begin Year 12 with well above average standards and they build significantly on these. Achievement is excellent. In response to excellent teaching, learning is highly accomplished because students' individual needs are provided for and they have an advanced appreciation of the music they study. Students show exceptional commitment and have highly developed performing skills. Very thorough planning and excellent resources enable challenging lesson objectives to be thoroughly met. For example, detailed preparation preceded the use of a video on Renaissance music in Venice, enabling Year 12 students to gain substantial knowledge of technical aspects of the music and its historical context. Investigative tasks, using the score, were carefully matched to students' capabilities. The teacher's enthusiasm was well communicated and high levels of scholarship were demonstrated and required. In Year 13, the versatility of teaching was evident in a lesson where students were composing variations in the style of Webern or harmonising a Lutheran hymn tune in the style of J S Bach. Individual assistance was authoritative and supportive, which enabled students to make confident gains in their skills and understanding. Formal and informal assessment of work is thorough and constructive.
182. Leadership and management of the department are excellent. The course has been very well designed to meet the needs, interests and aptitudes of the students. Resources are of high quality and their use is enhanced by careful preparation for each task. Talented students are given suitable opportunities for developing their practical interests and they make an important contribution to the first-rate extracurricular provision, which benefits them and younger girls. Music makes an exceptional contribution to students' social, cultural and academic development.
183. Teaching is of a more consistently high standard than at the time of the last inspection. More students are choosing the subject. The choice of set works and topics reflects students' preferences and exploits their strengths. Planning for further developments is excellent. Administration is impeccable and departmental documentation is of a very high quality. Improvement since the last inspection is therefore excellent.

Theatre studies

Provision in theatre studies is excellent.

Main strengths

- High expectations and excellent teaching communicate a passion for the subject to students
- Students' very positive responses make a significant contribution to their excellent achievement
- The subject is making an increasing contribution to the school's work as a performing arts college

Commentary

184. Results in the A2 examinations in 2004 were average. However, they vary year-on-year because the small numbers of students who take this subject have not studied drama at GCSE. AS results were better and the addition of drama in the curriculum for Years 7 to 11 is expected to make a significant difference to students' levels of attainment on entry which currently varies relatively widely. Students who are talented performers are challenged by the quality of teacher expertise in this subject. Others are very well supported to contribute to the making of drama individually and in a group.
185. The standard of work currently is above average, with some students reaching the highest levels. The pace of learning is rapid and students achieve as well as they do because they work independently and remain totally focused in lessons. Very focused teaching sequences learning to develop students' understanding of the social and cultural background that underpins the theory of different types of theatre. Year 12 students researched historical characters and wrote monologues in the style of the Contemporary Theatre Company. In their second rehearsal, students focused on the way in which

actors moved into the audience in this style of production. As a result, each student made adventurous use of space to draw the audience into the performance.

186. Teaching is excellent. Very effective questioning enables students to think for themselves, develop their own ideas and deepen their understanding of how to portray a character's feelings and emotions with conviction. As a result, in one Year 13 class, students focused on the part played by non-speakers to ensure that the whole scene maintained its impetus. There is prompt and constructive evaluation of students' ideas, both in discussion and marking. Students value and appreciate the high quality of teacher support, enthusiasm and understanding of the examination requirements. A strong feature of all the lessons seen was the way in which students were empowered to run rehearsals with excellent teacher interjections only at appropriate moments.
187. Excellent leadership and management have strengthened provision for this subject in a very short period of time with the introduction of a scheme of work that links examination work in Years 10 and 11 with the GCE AS and A2 courses. The use of ICT has improved with the installation of high quality resources in the refurbished studio. Sixth formers run the very popular drama clubs for younger girls. They enjoy taking part in a wide range of performing arts related visits and workshops. They use their dramatic skills to stage charity events and in high quality productions organised within school, as well as productions shared with other schools in the Foundation. The award to the school of specialist status as a performing arts college has opened up the possibility for links between music, art, dance and drama to be developed further.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

188. No subject was inspected in detail in this curriculum area. Physical education was sampled. In the Year 12 **physical education** seen, the teaching was very good with the result that the girls learnt very well and made very good progress. Standards in physical education are very high.

BUSINESS

189. No subject was inspected in detail in this curriculum area. Business studies and economics were sampled. In the Year 12 **business studies** lesson seen, the teaching was very good. Students learnt and achieved very well. Standards in business studies are well above the national average. In the Year 13 **economics** lesson observed, the teaching and learning were good and the girls achieved well. Standards in economics are well above average.

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES

190. This area of the curriculum did not have an inspection focus subject. One **general studies** lesson was sampled which involved all of the Year 12 students and an exceptionally challenging presentation from visiting speakers, including a self-confessed former terrorist from South Africa who had been responsible for civilian bombings where innocent young women had been killed who were not much older than the students. The girls' achievement was excellent because they were challenged to wrestle with such conflicting moral issues as the injustices of Apartheid, reconciliation and whether violence can ever be justified.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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