

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

## **TORQUAY GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS**

Torquay

LEA area: Torbay

Unique reference number: 113523

Headteacher: Mrs S M Roberts

Lead inspector: Mr Ian Stuart

Dates of inspection: 31 January – 3 February 2005

Inspection number: 268997

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Grammar (selective)  
School category: Foundation  
Age range of pupils: 11 – 18  
Gender of pupils: Female  
Number on roll: 849

School address: Shiphay Lane  
Torquay

Postcode: TQ2 7DY

Telephone number: 01803 613215

Fax number: 01803 616724

Appropriate authority: Governing body

Name of chair of Mrs A White  
governors:

Date of previous 25 – 29 January 1999  
inspection:

## CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

Torquay Grammar School for Girls is smaller than most secondary schools; it provides a grammar school education for girls, aged 11 to 18, who come from an extensive area within Torbay and surrounding parts of South Devon. Some provision at sixth form level is made in co-operation with Torquay Boys' Grammar School. The school uses its own entrance tests to select pupils on the basis of their ability to benefit from the type of education it offers. Because pupils are selected by academic ability, their overall attainment on entry in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science is well above average, though it is lower in most other subjects and covers a broader spread of ability than is found in some grammar schools. Pupils come from a wide range of social and economic circumstances, but, overall, these are more favourable than average. Relatively few join or leave the school between Years 7 to 11, but a significant number of girls join the sixth form from other schools, including several from overseas. These overseas students form the bulk of the small number of pupils for whom English is not their first language, but no pupils or students are at an early stage of acquiring English. No girl has a Statement of Special Educational Needs; a few pupils do, however, have special educational needs, with the most common needs being dyslexia and physical difficulties. The number of pupils from non White-British backgrounds is well below average. The school has its own residential centre in Brittany which is used by all pupils in Years 7 and 9 each year, as well as being used by many other groups from the school and elsewhere. The school has recently become a specialist Humanities College, and it also has the Investor in People, Sportsmark, Investor in Careers and Investor in Education Business Partnership awards.

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
19298	Ian Stuart	Lead inspector	
9391	Norma Ball	Lay inspector	
20629	John Bryson	Team inspector	English; post-16 English
23528	Andrew Bird	Team inspector	Mathematics; post-16 mathematics
3735	Alan Webb	Team inspector	Science; post-16 biology
22491	Lorraine Small	Team inspector	Design and technology
15163	Eric Deeson	Team inspector	Information and communication technology (ICT); post-16 chemistry
27666	John Dockrell	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages; post-16 French
15372	Patricia Walker	Team inspector	History; citizenship
15462	Cliff Blakemore	Team inspector	Geography; post-16 geography
10288	John Richards	Team inspector	Art and design; post-16 art
23499	Howard Seymour	Team inspector	Music
25748	Roger Moyle	Team inspector	Physical education
31838	Martyn Williams	Team inspector	Religious education; post-16 religious education
1819	Roger Crowther	Team inspector	Post-16 psychology
8864	Peter Clifton	Team inspector	Special educational needs; English as an additional language

The inspection contractor was:

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## PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**This is a very good school with many excellent characteristics.** The girls' standards of work and personal development are very high. With very few exceptions, they are developing into fine, confident, independent young women who are very well prepared to play a full part in the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is a pleasure to be in their company. The girls are given very considerable opportunities to develop their talents and to blossom as individuals. There is a very clear sense of purpose within the school community, and the school gives very good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Standards are very high and pupils achieve very well, with particular strengths in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science.
- Over two-thirds of the teaching is very good or excellent; there are some outstanding and inspirational teachers in the school.
- The school is very well led and managed, with the headteacher's excellent vision uniting the staff and driving the school forward.
- Excellent relationships, pupils' very good attitudes and behaviour, and high levels of care and support contribute to the very good climate for learning.
- The very good curriculum is considerably enriched by excellent links with employers and the community, and by the wide-ranging extra-curricular opportunities.
- The school's centre in Brittany makes very significant contributions to pupils' personal development and to the breadth of their learning experiences.
- Although good use of information and communication technology (ICT) is increasing, overall standards are lower than in other subjects because provision is not co-ordinated systematically enough.
- Inadequacies in aspects of the accommodation in science, music, physical education and psychology are restricting the range of learning opportunities in these subjects.

Improvement since the last inspection has been good. All previous strengths have been sustained and many improved. Standards were high then, but have improved since then, with examination results now very high. Teaching, attendance, the curriculum, leadership and management were amongst aspects of the school judged good: all are now very good; the school is now giving very good value for money. Weaknesses identified at the last inspection in ICT and assessment are much improved, though ICT remains a relative weakness. Use of assessment at whole school level and in some subjects is very good, but its use is not yet even across all subjects.

### STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

Key: A\* - very high (top 5 per cent nationally); A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below

**Overall achievement is very good**, with nearly all, including the most gifted and those with special educational needs, doing equally well. The amount of progress from Year 7 to GCSE in Year 11 in 2004 was in the top five per cent of schools nationally. The very high standards in English, mathematics and science are notable strengths, although standards are only above average in ICT where overall achievement is satisfactory. Pupils and students are highly articulate, clear thinkers who engage exceptionally well in discussion and debate across a wide range of topics and contemporary issues.

**Pupils' personal qualities, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, are very good.** Their attitudes, attendance and overall behaviour are very good; relationships are excellent.

## **QUALITY OF EDUCATION**

**The quality of education is very good. Teaching and learning are very good** with little that is less than good. Many excellent lessons take place, particularly in the sixth form. Teachers' expert subject knowledge and their infectious enthusiasm are key reasons why pupils and students learn so well. They are encouraged very well to think actively for themselves rather than being passive recipients of information. Learning is helped by good assessment systems, but learning is sometimes less thorough when lessons are not challenging enough or when staff absences have broken the continuity of pupils' learning. The range of subjects and what is taught in them cater very well for the needs of pupils and students; the open choice options system in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form works well. Opportunities are greatly enhanced by the large number of extra-curricular activities, including many residential and other visits, and by the excellent links with employers and the community. The school provides a high level of care for pupils and students. Guidance and support are good. The partnership with parents is good.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

**Leadership and management are very good.** The headteacher provides very good leadership, and other key staff lead and manage very energetically and well, and are focused on raising pupils' achievements. The management of the specialist humanities college bid and the planning for its integration into the school and the community have been very well handled. The governing body makes a good contribution to the work of the school and is effectively involved in the life and work of the school. Statutory requirements are fully met except for that relating to the provision of a daily act of collective worship.

## **PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

Nearly all parents and pupils are very positive about the school, and most girls enjoy their school life. A few parents have concerns about aspects of contact and communication with the school. As the inspection team believes that the school's systems are good, regular review by the school in consultation with governors and parents would help to clarify why these parents' perceptions are different. Some pupils think there is insufficient expert help available if they have problems. The inspection team believes that the care given to pupils is very good, but agrees with pupils and the school's senior managers that there is a need for more expert help when pupils have severe difficulties.

## **IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED**

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

- Raise overall standards and achievement in ICT.
- Continuing to work with the local education authority, take all possible steps to improve accommodation in areas where it is still inadequate at present.

and, to meet statutory requirements:

- Meet fully the requirement to provide a daily act of collective worship.

## THE SIXTH FORM AT TORQUAY GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

### OVERALL EVALUATION

**Torquay Grammar School for Girls has a very good sixth form that is very cost effective.** Standards are well above average and very high in some subjects. A very high proportion of teaching is very good and excellent, enabling students to achieve very well. Students are delightful, mature, well-rounded young people.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Nearly all lessons are taught by highly able subject experts whose enthusiasm for their subjects is infectious, encouraging students to achieve very well.
- Students' relationships with each other and with their teachers and their attitudes and behaviour are exemplary, though their punctuality is not so good.
- The sixth form curriculum is very broad and flexible, enhanced considerably by the extensive co-operation with the adjacent boys' school.
- The overall leadership and management of the sixth form are very good, with high quality leadership and management also in the majority of sixth form subjects.
- Sixth formers are very well involved in the life of the school as a whole and in the wider community, and have very good opportunities to take responsibility.
- A wide range of activities considerably enriches the lives of sixth formers.
- Although the building of the sixth form centre has character and interest, it is not fit for purpose and has major disadvantages as a base for a sixth form of over 250 students.

### QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	<b>Excellent</b> in <b>English literature</b> . Excellent teaching leads to excellent learning and very good achievement, with excellent leadership and management at the heart of the subject's success.  <b>Very good</b> in <b>French</b> . Results are well above average and students achieve very well. Topics give good insights into French life and culture.
Mathematics	<b>Excellent</b> in <b>mathematics</b> . Teachers' expert subject knowledge and excellent relationships, together with excellent leadership and management,



	lead to excellent teaching and learning.
Science	<p><b>Excellent in biology.</b> Excellent relations lead to informal but intensive learning by enthusiastic, well-motivated students. Excellent leadership and management also contribute to the very good achievement.</p> <p><b>Very good in chemistry.</b> Teachers' excellent subject knowledge helps students to make very good progress in their understanding and to achieve very well.</p>
Humanities	<p><b>Excellent in geography.</b> Standards are very high as a result of excellent teaching. Excellent leadership and management contribute to the high quality of provision, including fieldwork.</p> <p><b>Very good in religious education.</b> Standards are very high, and achievement is very good because teaching and learning are stimulating, with very good leadership of the subject.</p> <p><b>Very good in psychology.</b> Strong leadership and very good, well-organised teaching lead to well above average results and very good achievement by students.</p>
Visual and performing arts and media	<b>Very good in art.</b> Standards are high as a result of very good teaching, leadership and management which encourage original, creative and independent learning from students.

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Full details of courses inspected in detail and brief comments about courses that were sampled can be found in the sixth form section of the main report.

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

## ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The quality of advice, guidance and support is very good. Arrangements for the care and welfare of students are very good; concerns are followed up and most students feel very well supported. The Sixth Form Council and senior students are well involved in leading and managing aspects of the sixth form and the school as a whole. Advice on careers and university entrance is good. However, the sixth form centre does not provide adequate recreational and study facilities for the large sixth form.

## LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

**Leadership and management are very good.** The sixth form is cohesive and enjoys an excellent atmosphere. The head of sixth form, ably supported by tutors, very effectively monitors students' progress. The timetable works well, and co-operation with the boys' grammar school is managed very well. Spending on the sixth form is appropriate to income, and the sixth form is very cost effective.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Most students are strongly supportive of their sixth form. They are particularly pleased with the high quality teaching they receive in a relaxed, friendly and encouraging atmosphere. They do have concerns about the difficulties of finding replacement teachers when regular staff are away, but they fully support the encouragement they are given to reach their full potential academically and to develop personally as responsible, independent citizens. Members of the inspection team enjoyed very much their conversations with sixth formers and thank them for their help and co-operation.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS**

#### **Standards achieved in subjects and courses**

Standards of work seen during the inspection were very high, compared with schools nationally, in Years 9 and 11. Achievement – the measure of how well pupils are doing taking their progress and capability into account – is very good. Standards seen in the sixth form were well above average, and students are achieving very well.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Overall standards rise in Years 7 to 9, and very high standards are sustained and improved further in Years 10 and 11; the proportion of A\* and A grades at GCSE is particularly high.
- Achievement by nearly all pupils and students, including the most gifted and those with special educational needs, is very good.
- The very high standards in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science are notable strengths.
- Pupils and students are highly articulate, clear thinkers who engage exceptionally well in discussion and debate across a wide range of topics and contemporary issues.
- Overall standards in ICT are above average, rather than high or very high, and achievement is satisfactory.

#### **Commentary**

1. Before joining the school in Year 7, pupils have satisfied the criteria of the school's own entrance tests and are selected on the basis that they will benefit from the type of curriculum offered by the school. In practice, this means that girls are selected from the upper 25 per cent of the normal ability range. This is a wider range of capability than is often found in grammar schools; nonetheless, pupils' attainments in national tests in the core subjects (English, mathematics and science) are high compared with averages nationally. The judgement of the inspection team is that levels of attainment in other subjects are not as high on entry; in most cases, they are above rather than well above average, and, in physical education, for example, they are judged to be average overall.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	42.9 (41.5)	33.3 (33.4)
mathematics	45.5 (46.4)	35.5 (35.4)
science	43.0 (41.7)	33.1 (33.6)

*There were 117 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

#### ***Standards in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2004***

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	98 (99)	52 (52)

Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	98 (100)	89 (88)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	99 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	402.8 (53.9)	281.7 (34.7)

*There were 122 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.*

2. In all recent years, results in the tests taken at the end of Year 9 in the core subjects have been very high – in the top five per cent nationally. The trend of results has broadly followed the national trend. Compared with other grammar schools and other schools with similar levels of pupils' attainment on entry, the 2004 results were well above average and represent very good achievement.
3. Overall GCSE results have been very high in all recent years. Taking recent re-marking of some results into account, the 2004 results were the highest attained by the school even allowing for the adverse effect on overall results of the long term absence of two girls. Particularly notable is the 'value-added' measure which is an indication of progress from the time pupils enter the school until they take GCSE. This measure puts the school in the top five per cent of schools nationally. Compared with other grammar schools and others with similar levels of attainment at the end of Year 9, the school's GCSE results were above average. Taking all criteria into consideration, achievement at GCSE in 2004 was very good. Although there are differences in performance between subjects, none of these are serious and the school has analysed why some subjects did somewhat less well than others and is taking relevant action to rectify any perceived weaknesses. Overall, the proportion of the highest A\* and A grades in 2004 was 60 per cent of the total entry.
4. In present work, pupils' achievement in all years from Year 7 to Year 11 is very good. Standards progressively rise and are very high in English, mathematics and science by Year 9 and above or well above average in all other subjects. By Year 11, they are already very high in a range of subjects, and it is only in ICT, music and citizenship where standards are not yet at least well above average. The main reasons why standards are generally so high by Year 11 are the very good teaching pupils receive and the very good curriculum that is taught. Standards are not so high in ICT because some teaching is less challenging and, because the overall provision is not co-ordinated systematically enough, pupils do not fully consolidate their knowledge, skills and understanding. In music, some less challenging teaching and the poor accommodation hold back standards and achievement. The limited time available at present for citizenship does mean that pupils are unable to study the subject in the depth to which they are capable; because of this, standards are lower at present, but are higher in Year 8 where more time is available.
5. Other factors that contribute significantly to pupils' very good achievement are their very high levels of competence in using their language skills. They are very articulate and fluent, and use language very well, both orally and in writing, to match particular circumstances. Whether it is, for example, perceptive responses to literature or impressive use of correct terminology in science, pupils use language with confidence. Written notes are usually well presented, but most pupils go well beyond minimum requirements and research additional material which is well integrated into their work. Their oral skills and writing styles are assured, confident and of a high order. Where appropriate, their high levels of competence in mathematics means that they can use statistics or techniques such as graphs in an equally assured way. There are also many occasions when pupils make highly effective use of computers in their personal work to strengthen their independent learning skills or to make presentations.

6. Pupils' ability to think clearly and critically is a characteristic of their high levels of achievement. This shows itself frequently as they discuss and debate with each other in whole class or group situations and in their written work which often takes the analysis of the issue or problem to a sophisticated level. For example, pupils' critical thinking in religious education about the impact of faith on morals and ethics in individuals and societies leads to thought-provoking and well-justified arguments. Their confidence is apparent in many areas of their work. For example, in art and design, pupils are willing to express their opinions with confidence and, with this assurance, engage in bold, imaginative work of very high quality in a range of styles. In geography, high levels of achievement, including a depth of understanding of world issues, lead to pupils' being very conscious of moral aspects of topics such as international trade.
7. Although no specific teaching is provided for particular groups of pupils such as the few pupils with special educational needs or the much larger number of particularly gifted or talented pupils, the school effectively identifies and monitors the progress of these pupils. Evidence produced by the school shows that nearly all pupils achieve equally well. For pupils with specific learning difficulties, intervention strategies put into place shortly after their entry to the school are very successful in building their confidence and independence. In the 2004 GCSE examinations, most of the pupils with the lowest test scores on entry did particularly well, and the very high proportion of A\* and A grades indicate success with the most able.

## Sixth form

### ***Standards in GCE A/AS level examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2004***

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	99.1 (98.7)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	68.7 (62.7)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per student	342.0 (312.8)	265.2 (258.2)

*There were 123 students in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year*

8. Results in advanced level courses have been well above average in all recent years. Overall attainment when students start their courses has been, and is, above average compared with sixth forms nationally and the results represent very good achievement. A feature both in 2003 and 2004 has been the similarity of results in different subjects, with few marked swings in performance between subjects. Results in 2004 were higher than those in 2003 with a rise also in the number of higher grades. With 72 per cent at A and B and just over 40 per cent at grade A, it is clear that students of all abilities did very well.
9. In present work, standards are also well above average and nearly all students of all capabilities are achieving very well. The strengths noted in the rest of the school are even more marked in the sixth form. Students can discuss and argue convincingly, and their high levels of interest and motivation mean that the depth and extent of their work are considerable, often going far beyond the confines of the A level syllabuses. They are able to make astute observations and their confidence is such that they are able, and are prepared, to take original approaches to topics and ideas. The very high standards in art, for example, reflect the lively and very original approach to some themes. Research skills are of a high order with the ability to work independently well established from earlier years. As in the rest of the school, high levels of literacy and

numeracy skills provide a most secure foundation for work in the sixth form, and many sixth formers also use ICT well in extending their thinking and research.

### **Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities**

Attendance is very good and punctuality is satisfactory. Pupils' attitudes are very good and contribute significantly to their very good achievement. In the sixth form students have excellent attitudes to their work. Behaviour is very good in the main school and excellent in the sixth form. The spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils and students is very good.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Behaviour is very good and contributes to the very good learning ethos in the school.
- Relationships are excellent at all levels.
- Very good attitudes to learning and enthusiasm in lessons contribute to the very good achievement of pupils.
- The behaviour and attitudes of sixth form students are excellent and they provide very good role models for younger pupils.
- Very good spiritual, social, moral and cultural development fosters the personal qualities of pupils.
- Attendance is very good but some pupils do not show a sense of urgency in reaching their lessons on time.

### **Commentary**

- Attendance is very good and there is very little unauthorised absence. Attendance rates have improved since the last inspection as a result of the very good systems operated by the school to promote good attendance. Despite there being a provision in the timetable of five minutes between lessons to allow pupils time to move from one building to another, there is sometimes a lack of urgency as pupils move to their next lesson. Punctuality is satisfactory overall. Some staff and pupils are also late for registration, exacerbating this lack of urgency. This slackness has an adverse effect on some pupils when the expectations of teachers for prompt arrival at lessons are not high enough.

#### **Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (2003/4) (%)**

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.7	School data	0.1
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.*

- Almost all pupils enjoy their lessons and want to work hard; as a result, they achieve very well. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, enjoy school and join in lessons and extra-curricular activities with great enthusiasm and their attitudes to learning are very good. Pupils listen very carefully to their teachers and to each other, showing respect and courtesy, so class discussions are interesting and extend learning very well as each point builds on the next. Pupils have very good work habits and move from whole class and group activities to individual work with ease and without loss of motivation or concentration. Pupils show great willingness to be enterprising and take responsibility such as acting as form captain or members of the School

Council. They accept they have an important part to play in their school community. They carry out their duties with efficiency and dignity.

12. Behaviour is very good overall and usually exemplary in lessons and around the school. Breaks and lunch times are happy and sociable. There are, however, a small minority of pupils who can be difficult, but they are generally well managed by staff. A very few pupils can be restless in class and not as attentive as they should be when they are not well challenged with interesting work. The behaviour code is well understood and usually applied effectively so that poor behaviour is normally well managed so that it does not affect the learning of other students. Exclusions are used with reluctance and only applied as a last resort; there have been four fixed period exclusions in the last year. Although a few parents and pupils expressed concerns about bullying, conversations with pupils indicate that bullying is not a feature of the school and pupils are confident that any instances are dealt with quickly and effectively. Relationships are excellent at every level and this is a significant feature of the school.

**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	780	4	0
White – Irish	4	0	0
White – any other White background	21	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	1	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	9	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	9	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	1	0	0
Chinese	4	0	0
Any other ethnic group	2	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	9	0	0

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

13. Pupils show concern and compassion for others and this is very evident, for example, in their commitment to fair trade to support farmers in underdeveloped countries and their many charity initiatives. They recognise that they have a responsibility not only to their school community but to the wider community and world beyond. They reflect seriously on matters of faith and morality especially in religious education where many issues are explored in great depth. The school does not fully meet the statutory requirement of providing a daily act of collective worship stating that lack of suitable accommodation prevents this. However, pupils and students normally attend at least three assemblies a week. Assemblies are of a very high quality, contain acts of worship and provide a calm start to the day for inner thoughts to be explored. The spiritual development of pupils is very good and their understanding and respect for other cultures is very good. Pupils strongly value and respect the richness of other cultures recognising that they are part of a global family. They show a high commitment to charities and recognise that their support and care of people and their chosen causes is important. Pupils respect fairness, behave very well and show a sincere love of learning. The very good behaviour in school together with good relationships contributes significantly to the very good social and moral development of students.

**Sixth form**

14. Attendance in the sixth form is very good and punctuality is satisfactory. Students are very positive about their sixth form experiences. They enjoy their lessons very much, have excellent attitudes to their work and show a very positive approach to all they do. However, there were many instances when students were slow at arriving at their lessons and they were often not challenged for their casual approach to punctuality. Behaviour is excellent; students behave with maturity and courtesy to each other and to staff. Relationships between students and staff and students are excellent and this

contributes to the very good atmosphere in the sixth form. Students show a very strong sense of commitment to the school and to helping younger pupils such as acting as mentors to Year 7 pupils. Their personal development is very good and they provide very good role models for younger pupils.

## QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is very good. Teaching and learning are very good overall, with much excellent practice. The curriculum is very good, with some excellent enrichment opportunities. The school cares for its pupils and students very well with good guidance. Partnerships with parents are good; links with the community are excellent and there are very good links with other schools and colleges.

### Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are very good with little that is less than good; many excellent lessons were seen, particularly in the sixth form. Assessment is good with many strengths.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' expert subject knowledge and their infectious enthusiasm are key reasons why pupils and students learn so well.
- There is a considerable understanding by teachers, pupils and students of the value of different learning strategies and styles for different occasions.
- Pupils and students are encouraged very well to think actively and discuss rather than being passive recipients of information.
- The fast pace and challenge of most lessons extends pupils and students in their learning beyond merely passing examinations.
- Learning is sometimes less thorough when lessons lack challenge or 'sparkle' or when staff absences have broken the continuity of pupils' learning.

### Commentary

#### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 139 lessons*

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactor y	Poor	Very Poor
22 (15.8%)	75 (54.0%)	27 (19.4%)	14 (10.1%)	1 (0.7%)	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.*

15. Although a higher proportion of very good and excellent lessons were observed in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9, teaching and learning are very good in all year groups. Many factors contribute to the high quality of teaching and learning. The school is very well served by teachers who are subject experts and nearly all lessons are taught by subject specialists. Their knowledge gives them confidence in their teaching which rubs off on pupils in their learning. The teachers' obvious love of their subject and their enthusiasm also influence the pupils, leading to their thirst for knowledge and understanding in most lessons. This specialist knowledge enables



teachers to challenge pupils and to take the pace of learning forward very rapidly, often with quick-fire question and answer sessions with one answer leading to the next question and progressively building up knowledge and understanding.

16. As well as the infectious enthusiasm of teachers, another quality of much of the teaching is the encouragement pupils are given to think for themselves, to deduce and discover and to focus on taking their learning forward independently. This encouragement is helped by the excellent relationships between teachers and pupils which engender a very supportive but challenging ethos for learning. There is trust and confidence between pupil and teacher. With most lessons well structured, pupils are engaged in a variety of activities which often includes group or paired work, as well as whole class and individual activities. This combination of activities from thinking independently to working collaboratively in groups is an indication of the very good understanding teachers and pupils have of learning strategies. The school is putting emphasis in its programme for the professional development of teachers in implementing a whole school learning strategy that is closely linked with the specialist college programme. In addition, as part of their induction programme, pupils also learn about their preferred learning styles. Evidence from the inspection indicates that this emphasis on teaching and learning strategies with both teachers and pupils is having a positive impact on the overall quality of teaching and learning.
17. In the large majority of lessons, pupils' morale is high because of the high quality teaching they receive. Indeed, there are many outstanding and inspirational teachers in the school; about one-third of the teachers taught one or more excellent lessons during the inspection and most taught some very good lessons. With their high morale, very good behaviour, excellent application and productivity, most pupils want to extend their knowledge, understanding and skills beyond the confines of examination syllabuses, and many of them make increasing use of up-to-date ICT techniques in pursuing their own learning. Teachers provide very good role models for pupils in their learning, often providing exciting and challenging tasks. When, occasionally, teachers' expectations of work and behaviour are not high enough, or, when their enthusiasm and zest for encouraging pupils are less, learning suffers. Because so much of the teaching they receive is of high quality and they are encouraged to think freely and to question, pupils tend to react negatively when the teaching is less good and when the teacher's management of the class is insecure; productivity is lower, often brought about by unsatisfactory behaviour of a few pupils. Whilst these situations are infrequent, they can affect the learning of a number of pupils. Recently, there has also been a higher than usual incidence of staff absence which has, inevitably, disrupted the continuity of learning for some pupils in some subjects. The school has made every effort to minimise these difficulties, but recognises that the situation in these circumstances is not what it would want.
18. At the time of the previous inspection, there were some weaknesses in the use of assessment and there was no assessment policy. However, the school has responded well to this key issue from the previous inspection and all departments have an assessment policy in their handbooks. A significant emphasis is now placed on using assessment as part of the learning process, following a whole school training programme. Very good central systems are in place for collecting assessment data, and for analysing results, producing value-added data, and using this for informal and formal reviews with pupils.
19. There is now a consistent assessment policy. The majority of subjects use assessment as a very effective aid to raise standards and to engage pupils in their own learning.

The use of assessment is particularly good in mathematics, English, science, religious education and art and design. However, the good use of assessment data to analyse performance and of day-to-day assessment as part of the learning process is not yet fully embedded in all departments, and at all stages. For example, there is no regular or formative assessment for ICT, and National Curriculum levels and level descriptors are insufficiently used in a number of subjects as a way of helping pupils to set targets and raise their standards further. However, the use of assessment to inform target-setting and review is stronger in Years 10 and 11 where assessment is strongly linked to examination marking criteria. Overall, pupils understand how well they are doing and how they can improve. They are very pleased with the assessment procedures and the oral feedback that they get, especially the annual individual reviews they have.

## **Sixth form**

20. Teaching in the sixth form is even better than in the rest of the school. Over 80 per cent of observed lessons were judged very good or excellent. The same characteristics of high quality teaching are found in the sixth form as in the rest of the school. In particular, the depth of teachers' knowledge is outstanding and this leads to students developing their intellectual capacity to high levels as they engage actively with their teachers. Learning tends to be highly interactive with whole class and small group discussions, as well as probing questions and challenging material. Students become skilled in proposing and defending their positions and making presentations. Developing their own independent research skills is encouraged and the variety of approaches motivates students very well. Excellent relationships foster an atmosphere of trust and respect and a most positive climate for learning in which challenging work can be undertaken that leads to excellent progress in creative and logical thinking. Teachers' planning is usually first-rate, and lessons sometimes make good use of modern ICT facilities such as data projectors and interactive whiteboards as a way of enhancing the presentation of material.
21. The main features of the school's assessment systems apply in the sixth form as well. Students are given very good feedback about the quality of their work on a day-to-day basis. They are very clear about their own individual strengths and weaknesses. The quality of discussion and support from teachers ensures that assessment is a very strong feature supporting students' work, and the overall monitoring of sixth formers' progress is also very good.

## **The curriculum**

The curriculum in the main school and the sixth form is very good. Opportunities for enrichment are also very good. There is a very good match of teachers and support staff to the needs of the curriculum. Resources are good; accommodation is very mixed, but is satisfactory overall.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The range of subjects caters very well for the needs of pupils and students; provision within most subjects is very good, with particularly good opportunities to discuss and work collaboratively.
- The curriculum is fully inclusive with an open choice options system and very good provision for those with special educational needs and for the most gifted.

- The curriculum is greatly enhanced through excellent provision for all pupils at the school's centre in Brittany and through excellent links with employers.
- Co-operation with the boys' grammar school allows a very wide range of subjects and combinations to be offered to students in the sixth form.
- Enrichment provision is very strong with large numbers of activities, including many residential and other visits.
- There are some weaknesses in the co-ordination of overall curricular provision for ICT.
- There are inadequacies in aspects of the accommodation in science, music, physical education, psychology and the sixth form centre.

## Commentary

22. The curriculum in Years 7 to 11 is very good. It is academic, but meets the needs of the able girls in the school. Where additional support is needed, that is provided, and provision for pupils with special education needs is very good. Teachers are aware of individual pupils' needs and, where necessary, adjust lessons to ensure that pupils have full access to learning. Pupils are very satisfied with the levels of support available and confirm that this has enabled them to become independent learners. Similarly, though no special lessons are provided, subject teaching is organised so that particularly gifted and talented pupils are very well catered for.
23. There are a number of particular strengths of the curriculum. One is the teaching of two modern foreign languages to all pupils in Years 7 to 9; whilst this means that, overall, pupils spend more time on languages than is typically found (though less on each language), the way the languages curriculum is organised enables pupils to succeed very well in both languages and this opens up a broad choice for their language learning in later years. Another very strong feature of the curriculum is the range of opportunities subjects provide within their programmes of study for pupils to develop as independent learners; discussion, debate, seeking opinions, research and other active learning opportunities prepare pupils extremely well for their future lives as well-informed, thinking individuals. The specific provision for work experience, citizenship and personal, social and health education (PSHE) is mentioned in the next paragraph. For their optional courses in Years 10 and 11, every effort is made to build a timetable that meets the needs of as many pupils as possible by offering them an open choice; in nearly all cases, pupils' needs are met and the timetable works well. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is enhanced by the introduction of a number of additional subjects such as drama, dance, business studies and Latin. As well as offering additional choice, these courses meet specific needs very well so that, for example, the strong traditions in the area for the performing arts are catered for. Although curriculum provision for ICT is much improved since the time of the previous inspection and good use is being made of ICT in many areas, weaknesses in the co-ordination of the provision for ICT mean that the overall impact of ICT across the whole curriculum is not as strong as it should be.
24. The introduction of citizenship as a National Curriculum subject has been taken very seriously and its integration with the fortnightly tutorial and PSHE lesson has been well managed. As well as this lesson, pupils in Years 10 and 11 have a further weekly PSHE lesson which covers, in a rotational pattern, careers education, religious education, and a wide range of health, social and moral education. Again, citizenship is well integrated into this programme. Programmes of study and inspection evidence of work in PSHE indicate good provision for sex and relationships education, and for health and drugs awareness. There is much emphasis within the curriculum on

promoting international understanding, and the humanities specialist college development is enhancing this provision; already, such things as pioneering work with the Eden project and curricular links with Jamaica are established, and the theme of sustainable development and the concept of the global village were prominent in assemblies during the inspection week.

25. The school's enrichment programme is very good, with high levels of participation. There is a very wide range of extra-curricular activities in sport, music and most subject areas, and there is an equally wide range of visits to places such as art galleries and theatres, as well as field trips and foreign exchanges. There is an impressive list of 17 residential visits planned for the present school year. Particularly notable features of enrichment of the curriculum are the school's centre in Brittany and the work experience programme along with other links with employers. The programme undertaken in Brittany by pupils in Years 7 and 9 is excellently planned and integrated across very many curriculum areas, providing most valuable cross-curricular experiences and team building activities, as well as opportunities for rich cultural and personal development. The centre is also a most valuable base for fieldtrips and other activities. Comments about the excellent links with employers, including work experience, are covered in the section on work related learning.
26. The school's staffing is very good, with a particularly good match of teachers to the curriculum. Almost all the teaching is by subject specialists and this has a direct influence on the standards achieved by pupils. At the time of the inspection there was some temporary cover in some subjects. Although there is no evidence to indicate that this is having an adverse effect on standards in the longer term, some pupils are naturally sensitive and concerned about the loss of continuity in their teaching. Technician support is good, and the increased numbers of non-teaching support staff is enabling teachers to focus more on their core roles.
27. Resources for learning are good overall. Most heads of department feel that their subjects are well resourced; they are able to make requests for funding for what is required, which, providing the requests are reasonable, are always likely to be met. In many subjects, such as history and science, particularly good use is made of resources by adapting them to meet pupils' needs more precisely. There are some deficiencies in ICT resources in some areas which limit the range of computer assisted work that takes place.
28. The schools' accommodation is very mixed. Overall, it is just satisfactory, but it varies widely between subjects and even within subjects. For example, in physical education, there is an excellent all-weather pitch for school and community use that is ideal for hockey and there are some new hard courts for tennis and netball. The school also has use during the school day of a hall on the site owned by the South West Sports Association for the Disabled; this arrangement provides very good facilities for dance, though the floor is not sprung as would be the case in a purpose built dance studio. However, the gymnasium is too small for the present needs of the National Curriculum and is unattractive; furthermore, the grass areas are quite inadequate. Accommodation in the newish block for subjects like religious education and history is very good or good, but classrooms in the old part of the school are small for some groups, though generally satisfactory. The temporary accommodation for modern foreign languages is cramped and unattractive, but a new block is being built at present which will transform accommodation for modern foreign languages and also, by moving subject areas around and having more rooms overall, will enhance accommodation for some other subjects. The new dining room is first-class, providing spacious and attractive accommodation for civilised eating and for meetings, large assemblies, concerts and social events. However,

there are serious inadequacies in science and music, and also in aspects of sixth form accommodation which are referred to in the sixth form section. With the exception of one new laboratory, science accommodation is unsatisfactory. Because teachers adapt their teaching to ensure that safety is paramount and because their teaching is so good and the pupils are so well behaved and motivated, very high standards are reached. However, the scope of practical work and the range of pupils' experiences in Years 7 and 8, where full size classes are taught in science, are limited by the small size of the laboratories and by their facilities that are outdated for the requirements of modern science courses. The difficulties are less in other year groups because class sizes are smaller, but the outdated nature of the laboratories is still a limiting factor. Accommodation for music is poor and has an adverse impact on standards. Its isolation from most of the rest of the school and its poor condition send negative messages to pupils about the value of music in the curriculum, and the physical constraints of the building limit teaching styles and activities, as well as requiring time consuming and difficult movement of instruments from the music building to the main hall for things like orchestra practices.

## **Sixth form**

29. The general strengths of the curriculum also apply to the sixth form whose overall curriculum is very good. There is a very wide range of academic courses, many provided in collaboration with Torquay Boys' Grammar School. This collaboration means that both the numbers of courses and the combinations that are possible are much greater than either school could provide separately. Most subjects are taught in both schools as complete courses, but accessible, if necessary, to students from both schools; a number are taught jointly by staff in both schools so that some lessons are in one school and some in the other, whilst other subjects are only taught at one school but are available to students at both schools. A total of about 200 students in both schools benefit from the collaborative arrangements; students are positive that the arrangements work well.
30. Although there are a few subjects that are not available, the school takes a pragmatic view that it is better to provide fully for all courses that are timetabled rather than spread teaching resources too thinly by providing more courses for only a few students. The high standards reached by the students indicate that this policy is very sound. Nonetheless, there are a number of courses that have been introduced in response to demand from students; psychology, for example, is one of the most popular A level courses. Others, such as classical civilisation, provide breadth to the curriculum and intellectual challenge of a high order. No specific courses are taught for general studies or for general religious education, but the overall enrichment programmes provide very good opportunities for students to extend their experiences intellectually and culturally and provide for their personal development. Community service, in the school and outside, peer mentoring, help with physical education, Young Enterprise, whole day conferences on philosophy and religion and many more contribute to the school's rich provision. In addition, sixth formers participate fully in extra-curricular activities, and have the opportunity to take an on-line AS level course in critical thinking, with support sessions provided by the school.
31. Staffing in the sixth form is excellent with highly qualified subject experts taking all the A level teaching. Resources for learning are very good. For example, in both biology and chemistry, the quality and quantity of resources are real strengths; in history, there is a very wide range of printed extracts available to extend students understanding and use of the ideas of well-known historians. Accommodation for the sixth form has the same strengths and weaknesses as the rest of the school. However, in addition, there are inadequacies in psychology. Rooms are too small for the numbers of students and this restricts the range of teaching and discussion that can take place; limited access

to ICT also restricts learning opportunities in the subject. The old manor house, used as the sixth form centre, is no longer fit for purpose. It has much character and interest, and sixth formers like its charm. However, it does not provide adequate facilities for a sixth form of over 250 students; teaching spaces are too small for some subjects, and recreational and study spaces, including high quality ICT facilities, are insufficient. As it is a five minute walk from the rest of the school, time is wasted by students and staff when they have to move between buildings for lessons or for accessing facilities such as the library.

### **Care, guidance and support**

The school provides a high level of care for pupils and students. Guidance and support are good. Pupils' views are sought well and sixth formers contribute their views and ideas very well.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Provision for the care and welfare of pupils and students is very well organised and managed.
- Adults know pupils and students very well, monitor their progress and development and provide good guidance for them.
- There are very good arrangements for pupils joining the school.
- The School Council provides an active and effective voice for pupils' and students' views and ideas.

### **Commentary**

32. Staff take very good care of pupils and the quality of care and support has improved since the last inspection. Child protection matters are well managed and sensible arrangements are made for pupils who are unwell. Regular checks are made of equipment and the premises and risk assessments are good. A few health and safety concerns were noted during the inspection and resolved. A school nurse provides a weekly drop-in session to support the very good personal support and care provided by teaching staff. During discussions with pupils, they expressed confidence in being able to seek the help and advice of staff but also wished for more time to be available to them from an external counsellor. The school works consistently to develop and retain strong links with a range of agencies so that the care and guidance the school provides can be extended. However, local difficulties such as restructuring of support services have resulted in a reduction of support for the school. The level of support is now much below what the school believes is necessary, and the inspection team agrees with this opinion.
33. Pastoral and academic staff know pupils very well so that they have a very clear understanding of their personal achievements and academic progress. The year and house systems provide very good structures for care and participation in school life. Good guidance is provided for pupils at all levels. Pupils appreciate the individual support given to them by staff. The tutor system, very effectively led by heads of year, provides very good pastoral care for pupils. Personal development is well monitored, and staff share information and concerns quickly and efficiently so that support can be co-ordinated for any pupil identified to be in need of additional care. There are very well managed systems for assessment and tracking academic progress. Information from national examinations and regular testing is carefully analysed and provides good information for parents and teachers. It is used effectively to identify any potential

under achieving pupils. Specific advice for GCSE, A Level and university courses is well managed and pupils have a wealth of information from which they can make well-informed decisions about their future.

34. The induction programme for new pupils entering Year 7 or at a later stage are well designed to ensure students settle quickly and confidently into their new school. Pupils come from a very large number of primary schools, which vary from year to year; the arrangements for contacting, visiting and liaising with these schools are well managed, as is the induction day for Year 6 pupils. All pupils are encouraged to develop independence and feel that they have a responsible role in the school as well as responsibility for themselves. The School Council, questionnaire surveys and the seeking of views in tutor periods all provide very valuable opportunities for all pupils to contribute their ideas and views about the school, new initiatives and developments.

### **Sixth form**

35. Arrangements for the care and welfare of students are very good. Any areas of concern about the personal development of achievement of students are quickly noted by staff and followed up efficiently so students feel very well supported. The Sixth Form Council take some of the responsibilities for the management of the sixth form and take their management role very seriously. Students are fully involved in discussions about the sixth form curriculum and extra-curricular activities which include Young Enterprise and a wide range of community support tasks. The Head Girl and other senior students provide strong leadership not only for the sixth form but also accept responsibilities in the whole school with confidence.

### **Partnership with parents, other schools and the community**

Nearly all parents are very positive about the school and a good partnership has been formed with them. Excellent links have been established with the community and there are very good links with other schools and colleges. These links are continuing to develop.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Parents are kept well informed about what is happening in the school and the progress their children are making in the main school and sixth form.
- Excellent community links and the school's centre in Brittany enrich the learning experience of pupils and students and contribute very well to their personal development.
- The school has built very strong and supportive links with other educational establishments locally as well as abroad.

### **Commentary**

36. The partnership with parents is good. Responses to the pre-inspection questionnaire and meeting were very positive and reflect parents' confidence in the school. They feel comfortable approaching the school with questions or complaints. The school has used surveys to gauge their views and to consult them. Although not all said they were happy with reports on pupils' progress, inspectors judge reports to be good because they give clear information about how well pupils are doing in each subject along with, in most cases, helpful targets that indicate

what the pupil needs to do to improve their work. Some parents have concerns about arrangements for consultation evenings, and the inspection team recognises the importance of the school's continuing to be sensitive to listening to parents' views and responding to them. The information provided to parents through interim and annual reports, regular newsletters, and correspondence from the school keeps parents well informed. Furthermore, the Parents Forum meets regularly and is steadily gaining support from parents. These evenings provide a valuable chance for parents and staff to discuss school developments, new initiatives and any general concerns or questions that parents might have.

37. Pupils are very active in a range of charity and community service commitments in the local area and this contributes very well to their personal development, whilst also raising money for good causes. Good links exist, for example, with Torbay Hospital League of Friends, Lions Club and the Disabled Society. Work experience programmes in Year 10 and the very good support given to the school by the Education Business Partnership and local employers are excellent rich community links that are greatly valued. Business Partners and other commercial interests provide help with the frequent Industry Days as well as regular support and practical advice about the world of work. The school site and leisure facilities are available to the local community and well used. The extensive links with the community, local businesses and commercial enterprises are excellent and have improved since the last inspection, and are continuing to develop.
38. The new humanities college status is playing a vital part in the further development of partnerships with other local schools, and older pupils and students act as helpers and mentors in local primary schools. The strong association with Torquay Boys' Grammar School is very valuable, broadening the curriculum of both schools by extending the courses available to students and makes efficient use of the joint facilities. There are links with schools in Kenya, France and Germany, strong professional links with other local schools and also with the University of Exeter for initial teacher training. This rich tapestry of partnerships with schools and colleges is very good with many excellent features and contributes significantly to the ability of the school to provide high quality educational experiences for its pupils and students. A well-established and vitally important community link is the school's centre in Brittany. Not only is this an excellent facility to enrich the curriculum and pupils' personal development, but the close relationship the school has with local community where the centre is situated fosters the mutual understanding of the cultures of both areas. Furthermore, the centre is used for summer courses for gifted and talented primary pupils in the summer holidays, as well as being used for foreign visits by other local schools.

### **Sixth form**

39. Partnership arrangements are equally strong for sixth form students and their parents. Students undertake a wide range of community initiatives in the sixth form and are rightly proud of their involvement in the local community. Community service activities are of immense value to students' personal development as well as extending their learning experiences. Links with the Torquay Boys' Grammar School are very well developed and add considerably to the academic and social activities available to students.

## **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**



Leadership and management are very good. The headteacher provides very good leadership and has an exceptionally clear vision for the future of the school which unites and inspires all staff. Governance of the school is good, though the statutory requirement for daily collective worship is not fully met.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The headteacher's clear vision, excellent sense of purpose and very high aspirations have been shared with governors, the senior management team and all adults in the school.
- The management of the specialist humanities college bid has been efficiently and sensitively handled, and planning for its integration into the school and community has been skilful.
- The school development plan is an especially effective, well structured and comprehensive management tool.
- Key staff, including the leadership team, most heads of departments and pastoral heads, lead and manage very energetically and well, and are focused on raising pupils' achievement.
- Arrangements for the professional development of staff are excellent.
- The governing body makes a good contribution to, and is effectively involved in, the life and work of the school.

### **Commentary**

40. The governing body is well organised and strongly committed to ensuring the very best for all pupils and students. Governors provide a good blend of professional and parental insights which are effectively applied for the benefit of the school; their contribution to work related learning (WRL) in the school is particularly helpful. The committee structure has been revised and a corporate approach adopted and governors meet on a monthly basis following a clearly designated agenda programme. At present, governors meetings are held in the late afternoon, a time which they recognise and accept precludes potential governors who are in employment or have child care responsibilities and cannot be released for governors' duties during the working day. Meetings are well linked to the school's development cycle and governors contribute well to development planning. All governors have a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and this equips them appropriately to carry out their role as critical friend by balancing both support and challenge. Links with subject departments are sound. Governors are aware of the need to monitor and improve their own performance through courses and local training activities. The governing body is aware that it does not meet in full the requirement for a daily act of collective worship and its reasons why it believes that it is impracticable to do so are very sound; it satisfactorily ensures that the school meets its other statutory obligations.
41. The headteacher sets a calm, thoughtful and considerate tone that quietly inspires staff to give of their best. She has extremely clear vision and is a very well controlled and strong director of the driving forces that promote the school's success in maintaining and extending high levels of achievement. The headteacher is very well supported by senior staff whose complementary skills are blended together very well. They provide good role models for all staff and share with the headteacher a professional determination to shun complacency and recognise where there is scope for further improvement. All the areas identified for development during the inspection are already well known with appropriate action already in progress or planned. For example, in

ICT, much development has already occurred, and the school is working towards further systems to ensure the effective management of whole school use of computers. Good communication exists between and across all leadership groups. The headteacher knows all staff well, values and encourages them to be adventurous and helps to ensure support is available if it should be needed.

42. Management is very good and ensures that the school is well able to meet the strategic objectives that are set. Management of whole school issues and departments is very good, well informed and reflective. Leadership and management of English, mathematics and science are excellent. The management of special educational needs is effective with systems and procedures that are entirely fit for purpose given the very small number of pupils on the special needs register. Pastoral and academic teams are well linked; they monitor the achievements and developments of pupils carefully and provide a well-meshed support network for pupils. Development planning is very clear and tied closely to the school's aims. For example, the successful bid for humanities college status was very well integrated into the school development plan and is a model of excellence exhibiting clarity of thinking and skilled management planning. The school development plan is a very comprehensive vehicle for improvement, with the need for improvements in the whole school management of ICT recognised. New innovations are welcomed, assessed and monitored carefully and revised or replaced if they are found to have shortcomings. The openness with which new ideas and innovations are welcomed is a key feature of the progressive management of the school.
43. The provision for continued professional development of staff is excellent. Individual training needs are identified from the teachers' annual performance reviews, and all staff, teaching and non-teaching, have an entitlement to training; the value of the training is carefully assessed immediately afterwards and three months afterwards to evaluate its impact. The programme for whole-school staff development is also exemplary, with staff at all levels of experience actively engaged. The school has identified particularly good practice within subjects has often used its own teachers to lead a whole-school training day. This adds immediate relevance to other staff, and offers easy access to good practice through discussion and lesson observation. For the staff leading the training day, it has been an acknowledgement of their high quality work and, by leading a workshop, has contributed to their own professional development. Very good arrangements are made for the induction of new staff and the support and training of newly qualified teachers. The school's contribution to the training of student teachers from Exeter University also benefits staff from the school who act as tutors and mentors, and, in these roles, they are continually analysing the features of good teaching, and this increases their self-awareness of their own teaching.

***Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004 (857 pupils)***

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,739,104	Balance from previous year	85,333
Total expenditure	2,747,860	Balance carried forward to the next	76,577
Expenditure per pupil	3,206		

44. Financial management is very good. There are very clear links with the school's priorities within the development plan and humanities college objectives. Patterns of

expenditure are logical within budget constraints that are tight, with levels of funding which are below national averages. Balances are almost entirely for building projects that are not yet complete. In relation to the finances the school receives and its most positive outcomes, the school gives very good value for money.

## **Sixth form**

45. Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good because they are sharply focused on enabling all students to do as well as they can. Students are able to select their subject options from a very wide range of choices including some subjects that are offered in the adjacent boys' sixth form. The integration of students from the Boys Grammar School is very well managed and facilities as well as courses are shared very well between the two sixth forms. The sixth form is cohesive and enjoys an excellent atmosphere. Pastoral and academic staff are very effective and monitor and share information about students very efficiently. The benefit of this well co-ordinated structure is evident, for example, in the high quality preparation for university applications and the impressive success rate that students have in gaining places at their chosen university. Management of the sixth form is very good and broadly follows the same systems and procedures as the main school.

## **WORK RELATED LEARNING (WRL)**

46. For some time, the school's provision for WRL has gone far beyond the new statutory requirements for Years 10 and 11. Provision is very good and there is much excellent practice in the main school and in the sixth form. The school's activities in this area have many strands and are extremely well managed, with all aspects of provision clearly mapped out and thoroughly monitored. There is a thorough programme of careers education throughout the school within the citizenship/PSHE programme, and, in Years 10 and 11, careers education is taught by the expert co-ordinator in a block of time within the PSHE course. Pupils speak well of the provision and of the opportunities to request a more formal careers interview if they wish to have one. The careers programme is one aspect of learning about work, and, although there are no full vocational courses in the school other than business studies, all pupils learn about work through regular events such as industry days.
47. Opportunities for pupils to learn through work are excellent. The work experience programme is a model of good practice. A discussion with a group of Year 11 pupils indicated that work experience was 'brilliantly organised'. All aspects are outstanding from the preparation for the placement to the exhibition mounted by each pupil after the event. At this exhibition, which takes over large areas of the school, pupils relate their experiences to key skills required at work as well as analysing other aspects of their experiences. Each pupil is interviewed and her display judged by a team of judges consisting of the headteacher, senior managers, governors and employers. The inspection team was highly impressed by the evidence of the work experience programme, including many photographs of the exhibition. Because of the prominence of the exhibition, it is visited by all pupils in the school, engendering a culture from an early age that acknowledges the importance of the world of work. Much of this excellent provision for learning through work results from the excellent links the school has with local employers and its very close association with the Devon Education/Business Partnership. The school's work is recognised through its award as Investor in Business Education Partnership.

48. The school also encourages very well an enterprise culture amongst the pupils, and the development in pupils of independent learning skills – an essential part of an enterprise culture – is a major strength of the school. Indeed, work experience and the exhibition is called Enterprise Week, sending a strong message about the importance of enterprise. Enterprise activities are also encouraged in Years 7 to 9, and, in the sixth form, WRL is also very good. Some particular features of sixth form provision are opportunities, with the boys' school, to take part in Young Enterprise and an Independence Day that covers various aspects of life after school, including financial management.

## 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

- Test and examinations results are very high; present work matches these standards.
- Excellent teaching leads to excellent learning and outstanding achievement.
- Excellent leadership and management have enabled the subject to maintain an established trend of very high performance.
- Occasionally, inappropriate behaviour by a few pupils is not well managed by some teachers.

##### Commentary

49. In 2004, the results of the tests taken at the end of Year 9 and the GCSE examinations taken at the end of Year 11 continued the established pattern of very high performance. Overall, these results demonstrated outstanding achievement by pupils.
50. Pupils join the school in Year 7 with levels of literacy that are well above average. These high levels of literacy and very good teaching enable pupils to make very rapid progress in Years 7, 8 and 9. Consequently, the standard of their work is very high in Year 9. Excellent teaching in many lessons ensures that this outstanding progress is sustained in Years 10 and 11. As a result, the standard of pupils' work is far above national expectations in Year 11.
51. By Year 9, pupils are very articulate. They can speak in formal roles, use precise vocabulary, listen carefully and evaluate the opinions of fellow pupils. Pupils read accurately and independently. They can understand the ways in which language shapes meaning. Pupils' writing is confident, very well developed, organised and clear. By Year 11, pupils are eloquent. They match their style of speech to the different roles that they are required to adopt. They can make perceptive personal responses to what they read. The most able pupils can explore and evaluate alternative interpretations of texts. For example, in an excellent Year 11 lesson, small groups of girls presented and evaluated different readings of *Digging* by Seamus Heaney. Pupils have an assured control of a range of written styles. The writing of the most able pupils is elaborate or concise according to purpose. The achievement of gifted and talented pupils is well matched to their abilities because their teachers provide intellectual challenge and assessment criteria so that the girls can manage their own learning. Pupils use computers very well for internet research, making presentations, drafting written work and presenting assignments.
52. Overall, teaching and learning are excellent, with particular strengths in Years 10 and 11. Diligent monitoring of lessons by the head of department and her modelling to

other teachers of ways of managing pupils are strong features of the subject, contributing to the overall very high quality of teaching. However, despite these procedures, one lesson in Year 9 was judged unsatisfactory because the unacceptable conduct of a minority of girls was not adequately dealt with by the teacher. Nonetheless, overall, teachers have very high expectations of pupils and challenge them effectively. Consequently, most pupils respond with very high expectations of themselves. They work very well both independently and collaboratively. They are supported in this by the way teachers encourage them to assess their own performance and that of their fellow pupils. This is reinforced by the head of department, who gives both teachers and pupils guidance on how to improve.

53. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department's strategic thinking and planning for improvement have helped her team to produce a comprehensive scheme of work focused on raising pupils' attainment. Evaluation is embedded in the department's practice and is open, frank and accurate. Therefore, the head of department is aware of any weaknesses and works with her colleagues to remedy them. For example, when monitoring or self-evaluation identifies an area for improvement, the head of department and teacher concerned plan a lesson so that the teacher can observe the head of department teach it and, subsequently, put into practice appropriate techniques that are successful. Standards were high at the time of the previous inspection; these have been sustained and developed still further with the present very high levels of performance.

### **Language and literacy across the curriculum**

54. The school has an effective strategy for teaching advanced literacy skills. Consequently, standards of literacy are very high and enable pupils to achieve very well. The literacy framework is in place in English classes. Pupils are effective speakers and listeners who thoroughly enjoy discussions. They read fluently, with excellent comprehension, and make very effective use of higher-order reading skills such as skimming and scanning. They communicate their knowledge of subjects very clearly in writing.

### **Modern foreign languages**

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

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- In both French and German there are consistently high results.
- All pupils study two languages in the first three years at school and achieve very well in both.
- Pupils have good attitudes to studying modern foreign languages.
- Leadership and management are good, with very good leadership.
- The use of ICT is not sufficiently integrated into the teaching of languages, nor are pupils sufficiently engaged in their own assessment.

#### **Commentary**

55. In the 2004 GCSE examinations, in both German and French, the percentage of pupils with grades A\*-C was very high compared with national averages. In the last two years

in French over half the pupils gained and A\* or A grade and pupils' results were in line with their performance in other subjects. The 2004 results in German showed an improvement over the previous year, though the percentage of the highest grades was lower than in most other subjects. In reaching these very high levels in both languages, pupils have achieved very well.

56. In Year 9, present standards of work are well above average. Pupils show very good achievement in reaching these standards with only two periods a week in each language. The study of two languages reinforces common skills. A strength in both languages is the pupils' understanding of the grammar. Pupils' written work shows high levels of accuracy. In German, pupils are particularly competent with some complexities of word order. Pupils are confident speakers in both languages. Even where they make mistakes their message is clear. By Year 11, this very good achievement has been sustained. Standards in both languages are well above national averages at present and pupils have the potential to move on further so that they are in the range of the highest GCSE grades. Written work continues to be a strength because teachers insist on pupils using the features of style that meet examination criteria. In one upper set in French, standards are particularly high with pupils using language features that are not normally found until the sixth form. The time allowance results in more limited spontaneous speaking, although prepared tasks are of high quality. Several pupils identify listening as their weakest skill; an analysis of results indicates that this has been the case in earlier years as well.
57. Teaching in both languages in all years is very good. Teachers are highly skilled in their language and offer the depth of experience to give good guidance in examination preparation. Teachers have very high expectations of the pupils. Repeatedly in lessons teachers were saying, 'What else can we add?' 'What would make this better?' They challenge the pupils by teaching in the foreign language and by the pace of lessons. As a result, the more able linguists are working at and beyond the targets for the highest grade. Where, in one lesson only, this level of challenge was lacking, pupils responded without urgency and their learning was only satisfactory. Much of the teaching plans to engage pupils as individuals and in pair work. There is good open questioning. In a German lesson, for example, where a new grammar item was introduced, the pupils were asked to make up the grammar rule in their own words. Pupils make a major contribution to their own learning through their very positive attitudes, though neither language has integrated the use of computers into lessons, limiting the amount of independent learning that takes place. Pupils' work is regularly assessed, but baseline data are not used to identify under-achievement nor to set targets; as a result, a few pupils are not always reaching their full potential.
58. Overall leadership and management of both subjects are good, with very good leadership; both heads of department set good examples in their own teaching and commitment. They co-operate well as a single department to share systems, ideas and development. Results have been consistently at a high level. Although improvement since the last inspection has been good, with high standards sustained, there are areas for further development which provide opportunities to raise standards further. For example, whilst overall results are well analysed, the analysis of the performance of individual pupils is not well developed as a way of identifying what might be improved, and aspects of the use of ICT and assessment still need to be addressed.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **excellent**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers' knowledge of the subject is excellent; they are aware of the next steps in pupils' learning.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent.
- The attitudes and behaviour of the pupils are excellent, enabling the subtleties of the subject to be understood.
- The leadership and management of the department are excellent.
- The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall.

## **Commentary**

59. Standards in the Year 9 national tests in 2004 were very high compared with the national average and broadly average when compared to similar schools. There has been continuous improvement since the time of the last report though the proportion of pupils achieving the highest level declined slightly compared with 2003. Standards achieved by lower attaining pupils have improved. The pupils' achievement, when compared to their prior attainment on entry to the school, is very good. Current standards of work seen in Years 7 to 9 are very high and the pupils are achieving very well.
60. Standards in the GCSE mathematics examination in 2004 were very high compared to the national average. All pupils who took GCSE mathematics a year early at the end of Year 10 were successful in achieving A or A\* grades. The pupils' achievement from entry to the school up to GCSE is very good overall with the very high standards reached in Year 9 being sustained; current standards of work in Years 10 and 11 are very high and pupils are achieving very well.
61. The quality of teaching and learning is very good across all year groups. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent; they are aware of the next steps in pupils' learning. Good use is made of 'quick-fire' mental starters often linked to the main part of the lesson, though there is some inconsistency in respect of sharing with pupils of the learning objectives and skills to be acquired. Teachers have high expectations of the pupils and work is intellectually challenging. Resources are used very well. Very good use is made of the data projector to aid conceptual development and focus on the higher order learning skills. The pupils are encouraged to deduce and discover for themselves though there is scope for further development in collaborative work and testing hypotheses. There is a planned programme of homework that is demanding, extensive and caters for the range of ability. Time is used very well to maintain a brisk pace in lessons though some opportunities to use assessment to take learning forward are sometimes overlooked; however, opportunities for pupils to assess themselves are being trialled successfully in Years 7 and 8 and are being extended. The use of open-style questioning such as 'how?', 'why?' and 'because?' is strong and pupils respond very well to this approach.
62. The positive attitude and enthusiasm exhibited by teachers are infectious. Mathematics is challenging, enjoyable as well as understandable, particularly where the teacher relates new and previous work to pupils' own experiences, and exploits links between different branches of mathematics and other subjects. Relationships between the teacher and the pupils and between the pupils themselves are excellent. The pupils work very hard and records of work are very good aiding review and revision. The



pupils take a pride in their work and standards are very high. Very good use is made of the mathematics vocabulary to support pupils' literacy skills. Overall, there is a good balance between theory and the opportunity for pupils to practise newly taught skills; as a result, the acquisition of new skills, knowledge and understanding is rapid.

63. The quality of leadership and management is excellent. There is clarity of vision and a sense of purpose within the department. There is emerging an effective team committed to raising standards. Teachers are prepared to give up their free time to support both colleagues and pupils. The head of department is an excellent role model for both pupils and colleagues and has very high aspirations for the department as a whole. Standards have remained very high despite some difficulties in staffing the department. Issues raised in the previous report have been addressed and knowledge of courses and the curriculum is extensive. Procedures for diagnostic and formative assessment are secure and analysis of pupils' performance is thorough and detailed, informing curriculum development and the progress being made by pupils. Pro-active self-assessment of how well the subject is doing is ongoing. Curriculum initiatives, including how assessment can be used to promote learning and the use of the data projector, are in place; these initiatives are well linked with staff training.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

64. When pupils enter the school their numeracy skills are very high compared to national standards. The pupils can estimate, calculate, graph, measure and interpret information without having to rely on the calculator. Pupils who experience some difficulty receive very valuable regular one-to-one support from sixth form students studying mathematics. The National Numeracy Strategy is consistently applied in Years 7 to 9 within the mathematics department. Other departments, notably science, design and technology, geography and physical education, support a broad range of numerical experiences, but no systematic planning exists across the curriculum to build on pupils' skills and to make teaching even more effective. Although staff training in the use of mathematics across the curriculum has taken place, changes in staff means that more is now needed. Because there has been no overall audit of what is happening, opportunities are not always taken to develop numeracy further within existing schemes of work. Nonetheless, although there is no whole school policy on numeracy, standards in work and in school initiatives such as the Business Week indicate that pupils' competency in mathematics across the curriculum is very high and is not a barrier to learning.

### **SCIENCE**

Provision in science is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers' commitment, enthusiasm and expert knowledge contribute to pupils' very high standards, though the range of work is hindered by over-crowded accommodation for Years 7 and 8.
- Very high quality relationships create a supportive but challenging ethos.
- Teaching and learning are very good, leading to very good achievement.
- There is increasing use of up-to-date ICT techniques and equipment, with good technician support for lessons.

## Commentary

65. On entry to the school, pupils have been above national standards with the 2004 entry well above average. In the 2004 tests, pupils at the end of Year 9 were well above average with all pupils at Level 6 or better. Test results were better than teachers' assessments, indicating that most girls had risen to the challenge of the tests and had improved their classroom results by careful revision. The annual trend has been an improving one for several years, but the 2004 results took a big upward jump; this is because an additional group was created which enabled all class sizes to be reduced, and because of the use of CASE lessons and the increased use of past test papers, as well as by a careful analysis of the syllabus to identify which areas needed to be improved. The 2004 GCSE results were very high indeed at almost twice the national average for A\*-C grades, with every pupil except one gaining a grade in this range. This success is undoubtedly due to the change to a different examination syllabus which includes an examination at the end of Year 10 and which counts towards the final GCSE result. These early results are a big boost to pupils' confidence and provide a platform on which to build further.
66. Present work matches the very good picture shown in the examination results. Girls are often working far ahead of their contemporaries in other schools – for instance the standard of graphs in Year 7 and the use of formulaic equations in Year 9 chemistry; their use of correct scientific vocabulary during discussion and argument of a theory is impressive. Written records are neatly presented and many pupils include material from a range of sources to supplement their lesson notes. Achievement in all year groups is very good. Practical work is done enthusiastically and carefully, and laboratory discipline is very good. This is particularly important in the first two years when large groups mean crowded laboratories, and careful and orderly behaviour is especially important.
67. The quality of learning in all years is very good, reflecting very good teaching, with slightly higher standards in Years 10 and 11 than in earlier years. Pupils benefit from specialist teaching in the three separate disciplines, each usually in the appropriate subject laboratory, and from the variety of teaching and learning styles. The pace of lessons is very brisk and lessons contain a variety of challenges and a good proportion of experimentation. Staff demand high standards of both application and behaviour, and pupils strive to meet these. There is healthy competition to achieve acceptable results, but pupils also help each other with minor problems and share equipment and data with good humour.
68. At the heart of the very good teaching are twin cores; one is the trust and confidence that the girls have in their teachers, the other is the first-class relationships that exist between staff and pupils. As a result, question and answer flow freely in both directions and good manners and behaviour are a hallmark of lessons. The results of science investigations show that pupils plan their experimental work well and carry it out accurately and carefully. However their analytical and evaluative skills are not yet at the same high standard and need further practice.
69. The leadership of the faculty is excellent – forward looking and constantly seeking new ways to maintain and improve present standards – and the three disciplines, although separate departments, form a very effective faculty team. The leadership has established a very positive ethos in which pupils trust and respect their teachers and know that they will always be well supported. The faculty is, in short, a very good place in which to teach and learn. Resources are good and support an innovative curriculum well. However staff are inhibited in the range of what they can do with pupils by the unsatisfactory situation of small, elderly laboratories which

are overcrowded by large groups in the first two years and therefore limit the depth of work, hold back pupils from even higher standards in Years 7 and 8 and constitute a barrier to even better learning.

70. Recent curricular innovations, the increasing use of ICT techniques and the gradual introduction of interactive white-boards are tremendous aids to learning and these initiatives are to be commended. Support from technicians for lessons is good, though it would improve further with extra time during school holidays for servicing and maintenance of equipment. Overall improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. There is still, however, room for more written comments on how to improve the standard of work, and the problem of overcrowding from the laboratories that are too small, reported at the last inspection, still remains.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Very good progress takes place in some areas of ICT in Years 7 to 9, but pupils' work in some other areas is not fully developed.
- In Years 10 and 11, not all pupils are fully consolidating their knowledge, skills and understanding of ICT.
- There are strengths in the subject's teaching, but some lessons do not always fully meet the needs of the most able pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- The school is still working towards systems for the effective management of whole school use of computers and communications.

### **Commentary**

71. There are no examination courses in ICT. However, all pupils have a taught ICT lesson once a week in Years 7 to 9 and once a fortnight in Years 10 and 11. In addition, they use ICT in a variety of contexts in all year groups.
72. When they enter the school, pupils have average standards in the use of word processing and similar software. During Years 7 to 9, all make very good progress in these areas and in work with spreadsheets. However, because the development of their skills, knowledge and understanding of sensing, control and e-mail is not as strong, their overall standards are no more than above average by Year 9. All can use the internet, the spreadsheet, and the word processor and similar software (such as for personal publishing and presentations) fluently enough to reach the target of Level 5, and many do so at Level 6. However, some pupils do not appreciate the importance of using a specific ICT tool for a specific purpose and with a specific audience in mind. This means they cannot effectively develop these applications to meet new needs and will, for instance, often use inappropriate formats, colouring, and font sizes and styles, or inappropriately use material downloaded from the internet. Most pupils in Years 7 to 9 achieve well in relation to their standards on entry, which is an improvement since the time of the previous inspection. Also, their skills meet well their ICT needs in other subjects.
73. The course followed by pupils in Years 10 and 11 has been devised by the school and does not, as yet, lead to an external qualification. In most respects it meets pupils' needs well, and, as in Years 7 to 9, pupils encounter ICT in most of their other

subjects. Overall standards by Year 11 are above average, and individual standards in specific aspects of ICT are often high. However, because the overall experiences of pupils across all subjects lack sufficient co-ordination, pupils do not systematically consolidate their skills and knowledge, nor explore and extend their understanding of the full potential of ICT, even though their skills meet their ICT needs in other subjects. Consequently, overall achievement is satisfactory, despite very good achievement in many specific instances. There are also times in specific ICT lessons when some pupils, who have the potential to take their understanding further, are not challenged or stretched enough; a few become less interested as a result, and can, occasionally, become a little disruptive.

74. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 7 to 9 is good; pupils work hard, have generally positive attitudes, and develop many skills and related knowledge at a high rate. In Years 10 and 11, teaching and learning are satisfactory. The teachers' subject knowledge is very good and they make good use of the resources available. Lesson planning is, however, not always based on clear, shared learning objectives; this makes it harder for the pupils to know where they are going and how to get there, and for the teachers to be able to meet the individual needs of all pupils, especially the most able. Overall, teaching and learning are satisfactory, which is an improvement since the time of the previous inspection. The local education authority has provided help with systems to assess pupils' levels and set targets for them. However, because of pressures of time, assessment and target-setting are infrequent and, in particular, pupils do not know how well they are doing in any given context, nor how they could do better.
75. A key issue in the previous inspection report concerned the school's provision in ICT. Since then, the computer suite has been re-organised and a second one has opened; both rooms contain sufficient computers for even the largest classes, though they are rather cramped and have some visibility problems. There are now sufficient computers for each girl in the school to be able to spend an hour a day working with one; however, usage is below that, partly because of the difficulties with co-ordination already mentioned. The network is of good quality and covers the site effectively; network management is good and there is a satisfactory level of technical support.
76. Work in the specific ICT lessons is well led, with the head of department knowing clearly where he wants the subject to go and working hard towards that. Management is less strong because the lack of frequent assessment means it is not possible to monitor work in the subject to identify where improvement is needed; management of the subject is satisfactory. As indicated above and the following section, there are some weaknesses in the systems for the management and co-ordination of the girls' experience with ICT tools across the whole curriculum. However, much has been done since the time of the previous inspection and, overall, there has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection with the school aware of and planning to overcome weaknesses where they remain.

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

77. The National Curriculum expects that the teachers' and pupils' work in each subject area makes appropriate use of the tools of computing and digital communications for that subject's own purposes, and supports pupils' progress towards becoming good information technologists. There is good use of these tools by teachers in and out of

lessons – especially now that all have a laptop; there is also good practice in the teachers' expectations that pupils use computers and the internet themselves.

78. The subjects in which good ICT-based teaching and learning are most common are design and technology, English and religious education. There are also strengths in physical education and science. On the other hand, such work is as yet under-developed in art, geography and history. Often, the cause of insufficient usage by pupils is to do with access to the school's facilities in and out of lesson time. However, as well as having the teachers' laptops, the school is spending much money on data projectors and interactive whiteboards; there was good teaching using these in inspection week. To make best use of all this costly equipment, the school is working towards planning, co-ordinating and monitoring the use of ICT throughout the school and towards providing appropriate training.

## **HUMANITIES**

Geography, history and religious education were inspected in detail and reports follow. **Latin** is available as an option in Years 10 and 11 to a relatively small group in each year who take GCSE in Year 11 after less than two years of studying the subject. One lesson was sampled. It was an excellent lesson in which a tremendous amount of hard work was vastly enjoyed by the pupils; the very fast pace and sensible use by the teacher of her excellent subject knowledge ensured that all pupils achieved to their maximum potential, with their standards rising rapidly.

### **Geography**

Provision in geography is **very good**.

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE results are very high with a particularly high proportion at grades A\* and A.
- Pupils achieve very well because they are very well taught, with excellent teaching and learning in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils' experiences are enhanced by a number of interesting and new developments.
- The excellent leadership ensures that pupils are provided with a stimulating curriculum and this leads to very positive attitude to learning.
- Assessment arrangements are better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9.

### **Commentary**

79. Results in the 2004 GCSE examination were very high, with two-thirds of the pupils achieving grades A\* and A. Pupils did very much better than girls nationally and results were relatively higher than in many other subjects in the school. Standards have been maintained at this very high level in recent years.
80. In present work, by Year 9 pupils are achieving very well and have appreciably improved their knowledge and understanding of topics. Standards are well above average. Pupils are competent in map work, such as following routes in the local area and knowledge of places is much improved from the time when they enter the school. Many use ICT to record and read data, but difficulties in accessing computers reduces its use for group research. Pupils understand about world-wide development of countries and are very conscious of moral issues about international trade. Written

work is well structured and they use technical terms in context and this raises the standards reached. The quality of work of a few pupils is reduced because they do not explain answers fully or take sufficient care with illustrative work. In Years 10 and 11, standards are very high with excellent achievement. Pupils show considerable gains in knowledge and understanding of topics and work is well illustrated by knowledge of places. Map skills are high and pupils have very good understanding about natural hazards, such as the cause and impact of tsunamis or regional flooding. Pupils make excellent progress in developing skills to answer questions because teachers emphasise these in lessons. Pupils reach very high standards in coursework, particularly in the map work at Dawlish Warren and in the analysis and conclusions reached.

81. Teaching and learning are very good in Years 7 to 9 and excellent in Years 10 and 11. In Years 7 to 9, the aims of lessons are clear and pupils benefit from the guidance and support they receive. Teaching is well structured with a variety of activities, such as group work and this leads to pupils' developing skills as independent learners. Teachers set challenging tasks that are well matched to pupils' attainment. As a result they concentrate and improve their analytical skills. Learning is consolidated through lesson summaries but, occasionally, insufficient time is available to assess how well they have achieved. Work is marked and regular testing informs pupils about their progress, but the use of National Curriculum levels is under-developed and improvement targets are under-used. In Years 10 and 11 teachers have excellent subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils' effort and achievement. Relationships between pupils and teachers are excellent; morale is high and it leads to high levels of application and achievement. Lessons are well planned and focus on training pupils to think about issues and to apply knowledge. As a result pupils are able to analyse information and integrate answers through knowledge of places. Learning is well supported through a wide range of links and practical study, such as urban regeneration in Plymouth and local agricultural developments in organic farming. Marking helps pupils know how the work can be improved.
82. The head of subject provides excellent and inspirational leadership and supports teachers and pupils very well. As a result, morale is high and very good teamwork has led to the department being recognised for its pioneering work based at the Eden project, organic farming developments and curricular links with Jamaica. As a recently designated humanities specialist college, the subject has taken initiatives that have percolated school life, such as developments in the school's recognition in promoting international 'Fair Trade'. The subject is very well managed. Staff training opportunities lead to teachers regularly updating their skills; data is used monitor achievement, but closer monitoring of books would ensure improved information for pupils in Years 7 to 9. Since the previous inspection high standards have been maintained and teaching is even stronger than last reported; overall, improvement has been very good.

## History

Provision in history is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and achievement is very good.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- There is a strong sense of the enjoyment of history among pupils and teachers.

- Pupils achieve particularly well through the use of group work and discussion.
- Insufficient use is made of assessment to keep pupils fully informed of their own progress.

## Commentary

83. Assessments carried out by teachers in 2004 indicate that standards in history at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average. All pupils reached Level 5, the level expected of pupils of this age, and all but a very small percentage attained higher levels. A full range of evidence seen during the inspection confirms that standards are well above what is seen nationally. There has been a considerable rise in attainment since the previous inspection, both in the percentage attaining at the expected level and also at the higher levels.
84. Overall, standards in history on entry to the school are slightly above average and all pupils, including those with special needs, achieve very well to reach well above average standards by Year 9. Pupils make very good progress through group work and discussion because they listen attentively to each other and learn very well from hearing a range of ideas. In particular, achievement is very good in the interpretation and evaluation of source material and in the analysis of the complex causes of historical situations such as the First World War. They also make very good progress in discussing and writing about events from the point of view of some of the people who would have experienced them. For example, a group of Year 8 pupils spoke and wrote extremely sensitively and movingly from the point of view of some of the people involved in the slave trade.
85. Standards in the GCSE examinations in 2004 were well above the national average. Nearly all pupils reached grades A\*-C and two-thirds attained A\* or A. This represents a significant improvement, especially in the higher grades, over the already high standards of 2003. Evidence seen during the inspection indicates that standards are well above what is seen nationally and are very high for many pupils.
86. Pupils start Year 10 with generally well above average attainment and their achievement in maintaining these high standards while meeting the considerably increased demands of GCSE is very good. They achieve very well in the increasingly detailed analysis of historical sources and in making confident evaluations of cause and effect, giving a balanced and careful consideration of conflicting evidence. They make very good use of a range of notes which serve as very useful revision aids. Pupils are prepared to be open with their opinions and hypotheses and make good progress through doing this. Pupils currently in Years 10 and 11 are making very good progress and are well on course to attain high standards.
87. The quality of teaching and learning is very good. Lessons offer high levels of challenge, interest and stimulation, and pupils are enthusiastic and hard working in response. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge supports pupils well in rising confidently to the challenge. Lessons are well planned with clear objectives for the learning to take place and pupils know what to expect and what is expected of them. The very good range of tasks and activities maintains high levels of concentration. Teachers' very good use of discussion means that pupils make very good progress from exchanging ideas. Marking of work, although regular, does not offer pupils sufficient specific advice on how to improve their work. Concern about this was expressed in the previous inspection report and insufficient has been done to rectify

this. Inconsistent use is made of the recently introduced departmental procedures for assessment.

88. The leadership and management of the subject are good. There is a strong ethos for the enjoyment; there is also strong intellectual challenge and a good commitment to use this in order to raise standards still further. There is a good sense of the importance of teamwork in the department. A good start has been made in the introduction of a system to assess pupils' standards in history when they enter the school. The introduction of self-assessment by pupils is a significant step forward in helping pupils understand their own progress, but the fact that they have had little training in this means that their own assessments lack precision and challenge. Although there has been some development in the use of assessment in order to track pupils' progress, not enough use is made of National Curriculum levels to advise the very small number of relatively lower attaining pupils what they need to do in order to improve. There is insufficient monitoring of the consistency with which departmental procedures are carried out, so that some of these have not made a full impact. With attention to these areas for development, standards will rise still further with the good improvement since the last inspection continuing.

## **Religious education**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Pupils reach very high standards both in the GCSE taken by some pupils and in the course taken by all pupils.
- Pupils achieve very well because of very good teaching and learning.
- Assessment is highly developed and very well used to sustain pupils' achievement.
- Leadership and management are very good.

## **Commentary**

89. Pupils come to the school with knowledge, skills and understanding within the range broadly expected by the Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Agreed Syllabus. By Year 9 they are achieving very well, reaching levels well above expectations. They go on to reach the highest levels by Year 11. More than three out of ten pupils regularly choose to take GCSE, and, in 2003 and 2004, every pupil gained at least grade C. Nationally only about two out of ten pupils take an examination in religious education, and fewer than two-thirds of them gain grade C or higher. By these criteria alone, pupils have achieved very well in examinations at the end of Year 11.
90. The main reason why pupils do so well is because teachers make everyone think hard. There is a very close link between the very good teaching, learning and achievement, and with the very high standards attained. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge means tasks challenge and stimulate. Pupils explore the claims, teachings and practices of different faiths and, more importantly, learn to think critically about the impact of faith on the morals and ethics of individuals and societies. Demanding but constructive experiences through a very good curriculum, whether at GCSE or



embedded in the personal, social and moral education (PSME) programme, enable pupils to offer reasoned responses. These activities make a very good contribution to the development of pupils' own values and beliefs. ICT plays an important part in adding quality to teachers' presentations and strengthening pupils' independent learning skills. Year 11 pupils, for example, navigate through websites researching contemporary social issues such as abortion and genetic engineering. The outcomes in the form of leaflets make a profound impact through well-chosen illustrations and thought-provoking well-supported argument.

91. From their first term pupils know precisely how well they are doing and how to do even better. The encouragement to reflect and evaluate applies equally to their own progress through the different levels. The approach is not one of incessant measurement but rather of confirmation and stimulation, evident in pupils' very positive attitudes and behaviour. In Years 7 to 9 especially, the tracking of achievement, feedback, targeting and regular self-evaluation are outstanding. GCSE assessment is closely matched to the requirements of the awarding body and the work of non-examination candidates is regularly marked to the same criteria, clearly demonstrating that the quality, if not the quantity of work, is of the same very high standards.
92. Leadership and management are very good. Very effective, knowledgeable and skilful subject leadership, with an outstanding capability in building a strong and consistent team, underpins the success of the department. The many strengths identified at the last inspection have been sustained and standards have risen even higher. Improvement has therefore been very good.

## **TECHNOLOGY**

### **Design and technology**

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

#### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE results are very high in all design and technology subjects.
- Very good attitudes and relationships create very good conditions for learning.
- The quality of leadership and management of the subject is very good.
- The school provides very good opportunities for pupils to experience work in computer aided design and computer aided manufacture.
- Assessment is very good overall although the use of the National Curriculum levels with pupils in Years 7 to 9 and their involvement in setting their own targets for improvement is at an early stage of development.

### **Commentary**

93. Teachers' own assessment of the standards of pupils' work at the end of Year 9 in 2004 was well above average; work seen during the inspection matches these well above average standards. The 2004 GCSE results in design and technology were very high compared to the national average and this also matches present standards and the very good achievement by pupils in Years 10 and 11.

94. Pupils achieve very well in all material areas because they have above average basic skills in numeracy and literacy. They enter the school in Year 7 with above average skills in technology and their well above average standards by the end of Year 9 represent very good achievement. During Year 7 to 9, they make rapid progress to develop more specialist design and technology skills which broadens their range of designing and making skills. As a result, pupils produce high quality work in the subject. Pupils show very good formal and informal drawing skills, they use the full design process and there is good evidence of using computers to enhance designing, including computer aided drawing and computer aided manufacturing. The work of pupils in Years 10 and 11 is of a very high standard and they develop advanced skills in both designing and making within all the specialist areas of the subject. They are beginning to use ICT very well to present their portfolio work and to process the data they collect from potential users of their products. Their competence in computer aided design is increasing rapidly. They apply the process of designing very well. All pupils have very good attitudes to their work, and their overall achievement from Years 7 to 11 is very good.
95. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. Teachers enhance learning by preparing a very good range of interesting and motivating activities, which enable pupils to use both hand and machine tools to make a range of very good quality products. The learning is underpinned with the relevant knowledge and understanding which is a strong feature of the teaching. Work is marked regularly and pupils receive helpful support on how to improve. However, the use of National Curriculum levels with pupils in Years 7 to 9 is at an early stage of development and the impact on individual target setting is not yet fully embedded. Teachers provide very good individual support for pupils and foster very good relationships in lessons and this creates a very good climate for learning. In Years 10 and 11, most pupils extend both their design and making skills to a very high level and these are very well refined in the examination coursework seen.
96. Teachers use the examination mark scheme very well to guide pupils through the design process and this ensures a very good structure for learning. Consequently, pupils gain very good marks for each section of their coursework. There is very good use of computer aided design in all material areas, particularly in textiles where pupils use the computer aided sewing machines and in graphic products where pupils benefit from designing promotional material and packaging.
97. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The head of department has established very good working relationships amongst staff and standards are rising further. Marking and assessment are good although, as stated earlier, the use of the National Curriculum levels are at an early stage and individual target setting in Years 7 to 9 is less well developed. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection particularly in raising standards in Year 11, which are now very high. The quality of technician support is good, but its value is reduced because it is not available on a full time basis to support design and technology.

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS**

Art and design and music were inspected in detail and reports follow. **Dance** is available as a GCSE option and comments about dance are made within the report on physical education. Some work in **drama** occurs within English in Years 7 to 9, but is a popular option at GCSE. One lesson in each of Years 10 and 11 was sampled. The very good lesson in Year 10 was carefully planned with clear objectives; as a result, all pupils

participated very fully in the lesson and their skills reached high levels. Teaching and learning were excellent in the Year 11 lesson; productivity and enthusiasm were outstanding. Pupils showed splendid command of movement, tone and pace, producing lively, very imaginative responses to the teacher's excellent introduction. There are some staffing difficulties at present, but the interim arrangements are effective and are delivering high quality teaching.

## **Art and design**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Overall standards are very high by Year 9 and Year 11; the 2003 results were particularly outstanding.
- Teaching and learning are very good, with some excellent teaching.
- Leadership and management of the department are very good.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are excellent, and they achieve very well.
- ICT provision is underdeveloped at present with insufficient resources for computer aided design work.
- With growing numbers taking the subject, the present accommodation is now holding back some potential developments in the curriculum.

### **Commentary**

98. In all years pupils are able to achieve very well in a good range of drawing and painting media, art appreciation and some three dimensional work. By Year 9, overall standards are well above average, and a large number of gifted and talented pupils reach exceptional levels of performance. In recent years, GCSE results have been very high; work in progress confirms the school's predictions for very high results in 2005.
99. Pupils' achievement is very good and sometimes excellent. Pupils are working to the limits of their individual capabilities and extending their knowledge, understanding and skills continuously. In all years, there are very high standards of drawing from observation, with bold imaginative work in a range of styles. Pupils develop a good understanding of the art elements of line, tone, pattern, and colour in the first three years, and use this knowledge effectively in their GCSE courses. For example, Year 7 made excellent progress, learning about the art elements, in a lesson based on the study of texture. Their drawings of geometrical solids showed a developing understanding of the use of tone and shading to convey form and depth. In a Year 9 lesson, pupils learnt very successfully about aesthetics when designing and making a pottery vase based on studies of fish. They confidently expressed opinions on design, and showed a good awareness of style, when evaluating professional examples. They applied what they had learnt to their practical work and the resulting vases were not only well designed and constructed, but original and imaginative. When learning how to draw quickly prior to a visit to St Ives, Year 10 pupils, using chalk and charcoal, produced some excellent tonal studies of sculpture by Barbara Hepworth. In a Year 11 lesson, pupils, preparing for their final examination piece, showed a very good understanding of the marking objectives and the assessment process. In discussions, pupils demonstrate a developing understanding of the aims of some major art movements. Coursework shows very good use of the styles and techniques of major artists influencing pupils' own work. However, opportunities for ICT and computer

aided design, as required in the National Curriculum, are currently too few in all years to do justice to these important areas of work.

100. Teaching and learning are very good in all years, and there is some excellent teaching. Teachers have very good command of their subject, and are fully conversant with the examination requirements, and particularly the assessment criteria. They are very enthusiastic, good role models, and give very generously of their time. Exciting, challenging tasks are set and teachers have high expectations of pupils. Very good working relationships have been established, and the use of ongoing assessment, target setting, and reviews, encourage high standards. The use of self and peer assessment is well developed, and this is successful in boosting achievement and promoting self-confidence. There is scope in some lessons for greater use of questioning to reinforce learning, and develop deeper understanding, and, sometimes, alternative teaching strategies would minimise better the interference caused by the open plan accommodation.
101. The curriculum is enhanced by many extra-curricular opportunities, through gallery visits, competitions and industrial and community links. The high quality wall displays of pupils' and students' work are inspirational, informative and provide a stimulating environment in the art rooms and around the school. As a result of these factors and the high quality of the teaching and pupils' learning experiences, their attitudes to the subject are excellent; they are very enthusiastic and work purposefully and productively in lessons. Many pupils show a strong commitment to the subject, especially in their personal studies. The department makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal development through project themes and extra-curricular activities.
102. Leadership and management of the department are very good. There is a clear vision for future developments through teamwork, with high aspirations for success at all stages. Plans are forward looking, and include the development of ICT and computer aided design, and improvements to the accommodation which is, at peak times, inadequate for the number of pupils using the department. Progress from the time of the last inspection has been good, especially the development of assessment strategies.

## **Music**

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Results at GCSE in 2004 were well above average, though present standards in all years are above average.
- Relationships between pupils and teachers are good.
- There is a good range of enrichment opportunities and good provision for instrumental lessons.
- Achievement and learning are satisfactory because teaching is not always sufficiently challenging nor sufficiently carefully structured, particularly in Years 7 to 9.
- The poor accommodation seriously hinders pupils' progress and adversely affects the morale of pupils and teachers.

## **Commentary**

103. The 2004 examination results were well above the national average. Present standards, both in Years 7 to 9 and in the examination classes in Years 10 and 11, are above average. As pupils enter the school with above average levels of attainment in music, achievement is satisfactory.
104. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with some that is good. Positive relationships between pupils and teachers are a feature of most lessons and this helps to create a good climate for learning. As a result of a careful emphasis on musical vocabulary and its consistent use, pupils handle specialist terminology confidently and are able to relate it to their activities in listening, composing and performing. The early diagnosis in Year 7 of pupils' ability in music helps establish a starting standard for work; this diagnosis has much potential to be used as a tool to plan teaching strategies that raise pupils' standards and achievements further. However, at present, schemes of work lack the detail to ensure that progression and appropriate coverage of content are reliably planned for, and learning objectives are not clearly related to National Curriculum requirements. A consequence of this is that, in some lessons, there is not enough variety of work nor enough challenge and pace to take learning to the highest possible levels. Because of this, pupils' attention and application to their work are not always sufficiently well focused, although their behaviour is usually good. Overall, pupils' learning is satisfactory. Pupils' work is assessed but the mechanism for judging pupils' standards and relating these to National Curriculum levels at the end of Year 9 lacks the refinement needed to secure accuracy.
105. The number of pupils learning musical instruments is above average, and this good provision provides good opportunities and experiences for these pupils. It is well organised and effectively monitored, and, overall, music is well managed. The one full time member of staff for music gives a considerable amount of additional time to develop choral and instrumental groups outside the classroom, adding richly to the overall provision in music. In addition to performances in school and the community, one of these groups has performed abroad. Together they enhance both the corporate life of the school and the experiences of individual pupils.
106. The leadership of the department is positive and committed, and gives satisfactory direction to the subject. Overall there has been a satisfactory improvement since the last inspection, notably in the wider range of extra-curricular activities and a significant increase in resources by providing new keyboards, classroom percussion instruments and some computers with music software. However, the serious problem of inadequate accommodation raised at the last inspection still remains. The combination of its poor structural state, the inadequate size and arrangement of the rooms and its isolated location far from the main part of the school and tucked away behind the sixth form centre means that the accommodation is now poor. The location of the music department gives a negative message about the subject, and pupils often arrive late, sometimes later than necessary. The long and thin shape of the small main teaching room in the eaves of the building is most unsuitable for group work; this necessitates the keyboards being located downstairs, away from the immediate supervision and help of the teacher if the class is working in groups or individually. Furthermore, the keyboard room is too small for a whole class to work in at any one time. There are additional difficulties in that, for example, the orchestra, choirs and other larger groups have to practise in the main school hall because the music accommodation is too small; this means moving instruments and music considerable distances or leaving bulky instruments away from the music department so that they can not then be used

in class lessons. Overall, the poor accommodation affects the morale of pupils and teachers and is a serious barrier to raising achievement.

## **PHYSICAL EDUCATION**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- GCSE examination results in sports studies and in dance are consistently very high.
- Teaching is very good, enabling pupils to achieve well, although the inadequate indoor accommodation is a considerable barrier to higher levels of achievement and the breadth of learning.
- The subject leader has a very strong commitment to improvement and success.
- The very good extra-curricular programme provides opportunities for all pupils to extend their learning.

### **Commentary**

107. Standards in lessons and in work of Year 9 pupils are above average; standards of Year 11 pupils taking the general physical education course are well above average. Pupils are achieving well across all years from levels of attainment on entry into Year 7 which, overall, are average as a result of variable specialist provision in the subject across the very large number of primary schools from which pupils come. From Year 7 to Year 11, there is consistent improvement in standards. Results and present standards of pupils taking the GCSE courses in sports studies and dance are very high and these pupils are achieving very well. Year 11 pupils are able to plan, perform and evaluate performance very effectively. High attaining pupils, including the most talented, are successful in a range of sports at area, county and sometimes, national levels.
108. The quality of teaching is very good in all year groups; as a result, pupils are learning very well in lessons, though, over time, their achievements are limited by the constraints of the facilities for physical education which restrict the range of activities available to pupils. For example, achievement in hockey is better than in badminton because hockey has the use of a first-rate all-weather pitch, whereas badminton has to use an inadequate gymnasium that lacks the necessary floor space and height for pupils to develop their skills and tactical awareness. Teachers have a very good command of their subject. Lessons are challenging and teachers' expectations of pupils are demanding, but realistic. Work is planned to suit all pupils. Teachers provide very good opportunities for pupils to learn independently. In a Year 11 dance lesson, for example, pupils led warm-ups, choreographed routines and analysed performance through their video recordings. Learning was enhanced by the high quality dance accommodation and resources and the very good technical input of the specialist teacher. Teachers are confident in using assessment to inform individual pupils' needs and curriculum planning. The very good extra-curricular programme offers a wide range of sporting opportunities for all pupils and is very well supported by pupils, particularly in dance, hockey, netball and tennis.
109. The subject contributes very well to the improvement of pupils' numeracy and literacy skills. Provision for the development of pupils' ICT skills is very good and this helps them to extend their learning. For example, pupils' use of the internet, their analysis of

video recordings, their multi-media presentations and their word processing skills all contribute to the depth of their knowledge and understanding as well as developing their skills in physical education. Pupils' learning is also enhanced by their very positive attitudes. Participation rates are very high and relationships very good.

110. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The subject leader has a strong commitment to improvement and success and is ably supported by a dedicated team of specialists. Good procedures are in place to monitor, evaluate and improve the quality of teaching and pupils' standards. The subject makes a good contribution to pupils' personal development. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good. Standards in Year 11 and the quality of teaching have risen further. GCSE dance and the Junior Sports Leadership Award have been successfully introduced. High quality new facilities constructed since the last inspection include the fine all-weather pitch and new hard courts; the school also has use of a hall for dance during the school day. Overall, however, for reasons already described, indoor accommodation is inadequate.

## **BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES**

**Business studies** is taught to two groups of pupils in each of Years 10 and 11. Two lessons were sampled, one from each year group. Standards are above average with good achievement as a result of good teaching and learning. Pupils understand business terms such as cash flow and are able to read financial data. In oral work in the lessons, pupils did not explain their answers fully enough. Although their attitudes to learning were good, they were better in Year 11 than Year 10 because they were less well challenged in the Year 10 lesson and, as a result, their concentration weakened. Other evidence indicates that teaching is very well linked to the business world.

## **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP**

Citizenship is reported on fully below. Most of the formal teaching for personal, social and health education (PSHE) and citizenship takes place in the fortnightly lesson with tutors. This lesson did not take place during the inspection week; however, in Years 10 and 11, **PSHE** is also taught each week as part of the overall programme for personal development which includes careers education and religious education. Three Year 11 lessons were sampled, one of which included a talk and demonstration by a visiting speaker on reflexology. The other two lessons were both part of a major topic on health issues including, for example, mental health, eating disorders and contraception. Both were very good lessons in which confident, well-researched presentations were made by groups of pupils, with very interesting discussions within the lessons. The course covers a wide range of topics very relevant to the pupils, and it makes a very good contribution to pupils' personal development.

### **Citizenship**

Provision in citizenship is **good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The introduction of citizenship as a National Curriculum subject has been well led and managed.
- Standards are in line with expectations in Year 9 and 11 but above expectations in Year 8, where pupils are achieving well.
- Teaching is good, with some that is very good.

- There are good schemes of work, with clear identification of citizenship within related courses, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- There is good understanding of the subject's strengths and areas for development.
- Effective monitoring has led to improved provision and further planned developments.

## Commentary

111. Because of the timetabling arrangements described above, it was possible to see only one specific citizenship lesson during the inspection. However, other observed lessons in PSHE and religious education in Years 10 and 11 contained detailed citizenship objectives; other lessons, pupils' work and other evidence contributed to the overall picture of the provision for citizenship.
112. Attainment in citizenship in Year 9 is in line with expectations. Pupils show a good understanding of complex subjects such as the law making process and the stages of a bill through parliament. Pupils' responses to the opportunities they have to participate in their own and the wider society show good understanding of the way in which social groups operate, and the way in which they can make a contribution. The limited time available at present for citizenship does mean that pupils are unable to study the subject in the depth of which they are capable. Overall achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory; however, the greater amount of time that Year 8 pupils now have is having a very positive impact. Imaginative planning is enabling Year 8 pupils to start studying the short GCSE course in citizenship; these pupils' achievement is good, despite the fact that they are considerably younger than the age group for which the course is intended. As the allocation of time for this is greater than in other year groups, pupils show a detailed understanding of the topics they study. They make good quality notes which will serve as a good basis for revision.
113. Pupils in Year 11 show a clear understanding of the topics they study and their attainment is in line with national expectations. They understand both the legal context of the topics they study and their implications for the individual. They make good use of worksheets and, in particular, discussion to explore issues. They show good understanding of the way in which public opinion can be influenced by discussion and debate. The theme of ethical citizenship in Years 10 and 11 is taught through the courses in religious education and PSHE which were re-written to incorporate citizenship. This commendable development identifies in the scheme of work attainment targets from both religious education and citizenship. For example, a very effective lesson on genetic engineering helped pupils in their understanding of the implications of modern advances in medicine and to make judgements about ethical issues. Pupils' responses are very thoughtful and they can make very good progress in individual lessons with high quality work; their achievement overall is satisfactory with the relatively limited time available at present for the subject.
114. In the specific citizenship lesson, the quality of teaching was good. In the lessons that were seen where citizenship is integrated with other work, teaching and learning were very good. Lessons are planned well with clear objectives for the learning to take place, and include a good range of knowledge and skills. There is good questioning to offer challenge and make pupils think hard. Lessons are planned to offer a wide range of resources, including the use of ICT facilities, in order to maintain interest and promote learning. Teachers assess pupils' work and report on their standards to parents at the end of Year 9. There is limited assessment by teachers at other times and pupils are not given a clear picture of their own progress. They do, however, carry



out regular self-assessment, which requires them to keep a record of the topics they have covered and the progress they feel they have made. The assessment of the work of pupils in Year 8 who are on the GCSE course is more regular and structured and these pupils have a clearer idea of what they need to do to improve.

115. There has been a very clear view at senior level in the school of the value and place of citizenship in the curriculum. This has ensured that its introduction has been well led and managed. Leadership and management have now passed from a deputy headteacher to a recently appointed co-ordinator for citizenship. She is providing good leadership and management, and there are very thorough schemes of work that offer good guidance to all teachers of the subject. Although there are very good links, there is a clear distinction in the schemes of work between citizenship and the topics which are covered in PSHE, religious education and elsewhere. A thoughtful review of the achievement of pupils in citizenship recognised that the time allocation was insufficient and that it was difficult to monitor both pupils' achievement and the way in which the subject was delivered. The adventurous decision to run a short GCSE course for all pupils in Year 8 and then Year 9 has already had a positive impact on pupils' standards and achievement. There are appropriate plans to change the focus of the subject in Years 10 and 11 so that pupils who already have a GCSE can move into different areas of the subject.

## SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, nine subjects were inspected in depth 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. No subjects or courses were sampled at the boys' grammar school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2004.

**AS results are only shown for students who did not proceed to take the subject at A level.**

### *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	7	100	78.3	57.1	21.6	47.1	28.5
Biology	5	80	63.5	20	10.4	30	19.8
Business studies	2	100	75.3	50	15.4	45	25.7
Chemistry	7	100	70.3	14.3	13.2	34.3	23
Classical studies	1	100	89.1	0	36	40	36.5
Communication studies	5	100	87.2	60	24.9	50	32.8
Drama	1	100	86.6	0	19.8	40	30.9
Economics	1	100	71.6	100	18.6	60	25.8
English literature	12	100	86.2	58.3	17.4	46.7	29.7
French	5	100	79.8	20	19.4	32	28.2
General studies	5	100	73.6	100	16.9	54	25.5
Geography	8	100	75.5	62.5	20.4	47.5	27
German	2	100	81.6	0	18.8	35	28.8
History	1	100	82.2	0	20.8	40	29.2
Mathematics	15	100	59.9	60	14.1	48	20.5
Other social studies	9	100	67.8	55.6	15.1	43.3	23.2
Physics	9	100	66.4	44.4	14.8	45.6	22.4
Religious studies	6	66.7	82.2	33.3	26.1	28.3	31.2
Total	101	97	73.3	48.5	16.6	43.3	25.3



**Level 3 GCE A level courses**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	17	100	98.3	82.4	50.2	103.5	87.1
Biology	50	100	96.6	70	40	99.6	79.3
Business studies	6	100	98.9	83.3	39.4	106.7	81.8
Chemistry	30	96.7	97.7	76.7	50	98.7	85.7
Classical studies	6	100	99.6	83.3	58.1	106.7	92.8
Communication studies	19	100	99.2	57.9	40.4	95.8	83.5
Drama	8	100	99.6	37.5	42.8	87.5	85.1
Economics	3	100	98.8	100	54.3	120	89.8
English literature	29	100	99.4	69	44.9	95.9	85.5
French	8	100	99	50	53.1	95	88.9
General studies	3	100	94.9	66.7	30.5	100	72.9
Geography	32	100	98.8	87.5	46.4	107.5	85.2
German	4	100	98.6	25	49.6	80	86.3
History	18	100	99	50	45.6	87.8	85.1
Mathematics	39	97.4	96.8	82.1	56.6	103.1	89.5
Music	3	100	98.2	66.7	37.1	100	79.5
Other languages	1	100	97.3	100	66.7	100	95.6
Other social studies	51	100	97.4	68.6	42.5	96.1	81.6
Physics	4	100	96.7	75	45.3	100	82.6
Religious studies	19	100	99.1	84.2	49.5	101.1	87.4
Spanish	2	100	98.2	50	53.5	100	88.7
Sports/PE studies	5	100	97.8	60	30.9	96	75.4
Total	357	99.4	97.8	71.7	42.9	99	82.5



## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English literature and French, but **German** was sampled, with one Year 12 lesson observed. The teaching was very good and expectations of the students were high. In response to the sustained teaching in German, students were gaining increased confidence in speaking and listening to complement their very high standards in writing.

### English literature

Provision in English literature is **excellent**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCE AS and A level results are well above average; standards of present work are very high.
- Excellent leadership and management place planning for success at the heart of the department's work.
- Excellent teaching leads to excellent learning and very good achievement.

### Commentary

116. In 2004, both AS and A level English literature results were well above average. All students entered for the A level examinations gained grades A to E, with seven out of ten gaining the higher grades of A and B. This represented very good achievement.
117. Standards in the work of current Year 13 students are very high and their achievement in lessons is very good and excellent in some lessons. Students make significant contributions to oral work. They express their viewpoints and ideas clearly, explaining and illustrating them with evidence. For example, in an excellent Year 13 lesson, the students analysed Marvell's *To His Coy Mistress* and made very high quality presentations to the class. The writing of students is evaluative and analytical. They understand the themes and narrative structure of texts. They evaluate the contemporary values that influence authors and comment astutely on how interpretations of texts change over time. For example, after reading *To His Coy Mistress*, one group of girls explained how Marvell's references to ethnic minorities would not be acceptable from a twenty-first century poet. In Year 12, students make very good progress in developing analytical skills in lessons and transfer these skills to their written work.
118. Teaching and learning are excellent. Teachers prepare and deliver challenging material. As a result, students make excellent progress in improving their skills of analysis and their argumentative writing. Challenge and high expectations are features in all lessons. Independent and collaborative analysis is central to all lessons as teachers extend students' analytical skills and encourage them to adopt a critical approach. Learning is highly interactive with many opportunities for whole-class and small-group discussion. Students are expected to work independently through research and delivering presentations, as well as through their note-taking and written assignments. The variety of learning activities encourages and motivates students. Students of all abilities carry out their essay work with enthusiasm and enjoyment. Marking is very good and helps students to set targets to improve their work. The

sharing of assessment objectives clarifies for students what they have to improve to achieve their goals and teachers use written and spoken comments to clarify what each student needs to do to improve.

119. Leadership and management are excellent. Members of the department have a shared commitment to teach students a love of literature and language. Planning for success is at the heart of the department's work. Improvement has been excellent since the previous inspection. Standards in English literature are very high now and achievement is very good.

## Language and literacy across the curriculum

120. Students' spoken and written communication skills are well above average in all sixth-form subjects. Their general expression is very clear. Research skills are very good. Many subjects expect students to give presentations. High expectations are set for coherent delivery and explanations. Students write well to communicate information, ideas and opinions to intended audiences.

## French

Provision in French is **very good**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- A level results in 2004 were well above average, representing very good achievement.
- Homework is regularly directed to internet research, encouraging active learning, though students tend to be rather passive in oral work.
- The topics covered give good insights into French life and culture.

## Commentary

121. In the 2004 GCE A level examination, all students either matched or improved on their predicted grades, with a majority of obtaining A and B grades. All students completed the course and showed very good achievement from their GCSE grades with overall results well above average.
122. The standards of the current students are also well above average with very good achievement. The quality of written work is a strength in both years. There are many examples of continuous writing of a high order. Essays are well structured. The content of essays requiring argument reflects the maturity of the students' thinking. Written work shows a good response to the teachers' guidance to use the language features that enhance the style of their writing. The teachers' sustained use of French for teaching has given the students good listening skills. The pressures of time in the years leading to GCSE have resulted in students' speaking skills being less well developed than their other language skills, and there is still less confidence and fluency in oral work than in other work in Year 13. Some students are hesitant to offer answers unless they are totally sure that they are correct. However, in Year 12 students are more responsive and are gaining confidence, but there is not an easy spontaneity. Nonetheless, overall, in both years, students' achievement is very good.
123. Teaching in both years is very good. Students benefit from having one native speaker and one teacher with extensive experience of preparing students for examinations at this level. There is appropriate emphasis on securing and enriching the basis of formal grammar to support all their work. Oral work is planned for every lesson, but it is not always structured to ensure that all students participate actively, limiting some of its effectiveness. However, teachers do encourage the students to be independent learners. They regularly set homework tasks which require the use of the internet for research. Relationships between teachers and students are excellent and these support learning, and a shared sense of humour encourages participation. The



marking of work is thorough and gives good guidance to students on the areas that require improvement.

124. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The quality of the teaching and examination successes have encouraged a good take-up of the subject in the sixth form. The sharing of the teaching in both year groups enables the students to benefit from the particular strengths of the teachers. The selection of topics to be studied serve to extend language skills and to make students consider their stance on topics of current concern, such as the environment, drugs and euthanasia. Topics chosen also give students insights into aspects of French life and culture. Students have the opportunity to participate in exchanges; these are very helpful and positive in developing an understanding of French life and culture, as well as improving oral skills. However, identifying strategies to improve students' confidence in oral work is a key factor in raising standards further.

## **MATHEMATICS**

Provision in mathematics is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching and learning are excellent.
- Teachers' knowledge of the subject is excellent.
- Leadership and management of the subject are excellent.
- Relationships between students and teachers are excellent, resulting in much collaborative working.
- ICT is used very well as a resource for learning.

### **Commentary**

125. In 2004, a small number of students were entered for GCE AS level mathematics at the end of a one year course and the standards achieved were above average compared to the national average. Standards of work of present Year 12 students studying GCE A level are well above average compared to national A level standards and students are achieving very well. They are well into the new courses and are making very good use of their previous GCSE work to move into new areas.
126. Standards in the 2004 GCE A level examination were well above the national average and represented further improvement on the already well above average standards of the previous year; a significant proportion of students achieved the highest possible grades. All students entered for the GCE further mathematics A level examination in 2004 achieved the highest grades. Current standards of work seen in Year 13 are well above average and students are achieving very well. Students' files contain evidence of much completed work and provide a very good record for review and revision. Students recall knowledge very well and apply it in discussion and their written work. For example, students applied their knowledge of calculus very well when solving various differential equations for their general and particular solutions.
127. The quality of teaching and learning is excellent. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent, with a depth of expertise that is impressive. Lessons provide very good enrichment using a variety of resources; ICT is used very well as an aid to learning, though occasions for individual research are limited. The teachers' lesson planning is

thorough and detailed. The pace of lessons is brisk often requiring students to recall past work, which is done well and results in rapid progress through the scheme of work. Very good choice of examples throws up many challenging issues for the students to resolve. Homework is set regularly, though the use of diagnostic comments linked to target grades could be extended. There are high standards of rigour, precision and presentation of work, providing a very good record for review and revision. Relationships with the students are excellent and, as a result, students work very hard and contribute a great deal. The teachers are prepared to support students outside timetabled lessons.

128. The quality of leadership and management is excellent. The head of department is aware of course requirements and has managed the changes and staffing difficulties very well. Issues raised in the previous report have been addressed. The A level results have improved year on year since the time of the previous report, particularly the consistently improving proportion of students achieving the highest grades. There is clarity of vision and a sense of purpose within the department. The professional development of colleagues is thorough and a committed team of subject specialists is emerging. Procedures for assessment and the analysis of data are well established. There are very positive views expressed by students of the department who are also very appreciative of the support provided outside lessons.

### **Mathematics across the curriculum**

129. Students' standards in mathematics are very high. However, links between departments that exist within schemes of work and programmes of study are not being identified and taken advantage of in ways that would make teaching and learning even more effective.

## **SCIENCE**

The main foci of the inspection were biology and chemistry, but **physics** was also sampled. Physics results in the 2004 Advanced Level examinations were well above national expectations, albeit with a small group. Standards in the present Year 12 and Year 13 groups continue this high level of attainment, and the level of teaching is very good.

### **Biology**

Provision in biology is **excellent**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teachers are highly experienced experts in their subject; teaching is very good, and sometimes excellent.
- Relationships between teachers and students are excellent, leading to informal but intensive learning.
- Students are enthusiastic and well motivated.
- The subject is excellently led and managed.
- Very good resources are used to enliven learning in a variety of ways.

### **Commentary**

130. Biology has been the most popular science subject for several years, and results have risen steadily. In 2004 every student gained a grade in the A - E range at A level and almost three-quarters of these were the higher A or B grades. Those students who chose not to continue the subject beyond the first year achieved above average grades in the AS examinations.
131. In present work seen, the well above average standards of the 2004 A level results are being maintained by those presently studying the subject, and it is clear that students are motivated to revise and consolidate their classroom learning when it comes to examination time. The subject is taught in conjunction with sixth formers from the adjacent boys' school, half the teaching taking place on each site. The effect of mixed gender classes is positive with all students concentrating well and striving not to be outdone or overshadowed by the other sex. The competition that is engendered is a healthy stimulus to learning, and the students questioned said that they valued it.
132. Students' files are extremely detailed – often well beyond the requirements of the syllabus - with additional material gathered from a variety of sources, and this reflects students' high levels of interest and motivation. Practical work is meticulous, and, as was demonstrated in one lesson when they were faced with an unexpected task, they are quite capable of planning quickly, thinking and evaluating while experimenting and adapting their work to meet unexpected events. They help each other over minor hurdles and discuss and argue convincingly. Safety requirements are always met without the need for reminders. Oral work is most impressive. Students are confident in setting out their ideas and will argue their ideas through convincingly and their command of complex scientific vocabulary is impressive. Independent learning is a strength and students are good at researching for new information and expert at using the internet to find the most recent research results. Determination and perseverance are also evident, as demonstrated in a series of multi-media presentations on aspects of immunity, produced in three working days. Achievement though both years is very good.
133. Teaching and learning are very good; in lessons seen during the inspection, the standards of teaching and learning never fell below very good and they were sometimes excellent. The students benefit from the expert subject knowledge and the variety of teaching styles which staff bring to the subject. Since group sizes are reasonably small, students often benefit from a tutorial style of learning in which more work is covered and to a greater depth than is possible with a large class. Individuals can then also be quietly and appropriately supported. Lessons abound with challenges of recall, hypothesising, experiment and of research and students thrive on these. Teachers' commitment and enthusiasm are also factors which raise interest and motivation, and the latter is also boosted by the fact that the majority of students have firm ideas on their future careers, what is needed to succeed in them, and how to achieve that success. The high quality of relationships between teachers and students is even more evident than in the rest of the school, and students value being treated as responsible young adults. All these factors contribute to good learning and contribute to the high retention rate during AS and A level courses, and the high proportion of students who begin Year 12 with the fixed intention of seeing the subject through the full two years.
134. The same vision, drive and enthusiastic leadership exhibited in the science faculty in the rest of the school are also evident in the organisation and management of the biology department in the sixth form. The fact that teaching is shared with a department on an adjacent site does not affect the standards achieved or aimed for in

this school. Co-operation is obviously good and both male and female students have commented on the beneficial effects of having expert staff available to consult on both school sites. Accommodation is not a problem for sixth form groups in the same laboratories as the rest of the school, and resources are good. The use of ICT techniques, data projectors and an interactive whiteboard together with the schools own intranet system have produced huge benefits for sixth form students and have greatly widened the scope of material available to both teacher and student as well as enabling the teacher to use strategies that were impossible before. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good, with improvements in resources, the quality of teaching, examination results and the overall standard of provision.

## **Chemistry**

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Students make very good progress in their subject knowledge and understanding and achieve very well.
- All the teachers have an excellent grasp of the subject, though some refinements of teaching methods would help to ensure excellent learning all the time.
- The subject is very well resourced and very well led and managed.

## **Commentary**

135. In recent years, there has been a steady improvement in A level results, and the number of candidates has almost doubled. In 2004, 35 students took the examination; apart from one with special circumstances, all passed and over three-quarters reached the top grades of A and B. These results were well above the national averages and better than at the time of the previous inspection. The few students who completed the AS course in Year 12 and did not go on to A level also achieved well above average results.
136. Present standards seen during observation of lessons, studying current students' work, and talking with them are well above average. Overall, the students' grasp of the subject when they join the sixth form is above average. However, during their two years on the course, all make very good progress and they are achieving very well; again, this is better than at the time of the previous inspection. Particularly good progress is made in understanding what the subject is about, and how all aspects relate back to the fundamental properties of the fundamental particles involved. Students also develop almost professional practical skills during the course. Their attitudes are highly positive, often excellent, and they face and overcome challenge with relish. Just a few students, particularly those who find the subject relatively easy and are, perhaps, not being fully stretched, seem less inclined to question what they meet or to find out more than the teachers expect of them.
137. The quality of teaching is very good, with a number of excellent features, most notably the teachers' own encyclopaedic command of chemistry and the way they encourage the students, including willingly providing extra help outside of lessons when needed. The rate and quality of the students' learning matches the very good and sometimes excellent teaching. There are a few ways which would improve teaching and learning still further to make both consistently excellent. For example, in the observed lessons,

there was little formal working in small groups, and teachers did not check that students knew how best to take notes, use notes, or carry out book and internet research. As a result, collaborative and independent learning skills were not as highly developed as would ensure the most effective and efficient learning all the time. All lessons would benefit from having specific learning objectives, shared with the students at the start and used as the basis for lesson evaluation at the end. Where a teacher feels there is a great amount of ground to cover in a single lesson, there is a tendency for the lesson to become more of a lecture so that students have a great deal of catching up to do later when the teacher is not present. There are also times when students would focus better if they had greater awareness of what they need to do to improve further. Nonetheless, the stimulus of the rigorous teaching and high intellectual content means that learning is rapid and effective.

138. Although one of the two laboratories is in need of refurbishment, accommodation for the A level course is good, with plenty of storage space and a small resources centre of which the students speak highly. Standards are not adversely affected by any shortcomings in the accommodation. Resource levels are overall good; however, shortages mean there is no use of computers by the students in lessons or for data logging. The specialist teachers provide an excellent resource and the technicians form a good team with the teachers for the benefit of the students. The team is very well led and managed despite the present subject leader's role being acting head of subject and another teacher being temporary. The present subject leader provides a very good role model for the students in a subject where there is a great shortage of females; she knows clearly the strengths and the few weaknesses of work in the subject, oversees it very effectively, and knows how to move forward. There has been good improvement since the previous inspection.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

### **Information and communication technology across the curriculum**

139. No courses in ICT are taught in the school's sixth form, though a number of students join A level classes in the boys' grammar school. As none of these classes was observed, it is not possible to comment on standards attained; within the girls' school, there is no assessment of students' proficiency in ICT against the national Key Skills standards. However, students' ICT skills are sufficient to meet their needs in their different courses and there is plenty of use in a number of courses of the internet, word processing, and presentation software. There is good practice in business studies and the sciences, though there are some problems about access to ICT for students of psychology. Students themselves indicate that ICT facilities are much improved in recent years and that they are able to use the necessary facilities for research and other purposes when they need to do so.

## **HUMANITIES**

Geography, religious education and psychology were inspected in detail and are reported on fully. History and classical civilisation are also taught, and both were sampled. In the sampled **history** lesson, teaching was very good and offered a high level of challenge. Students responded to this very well by making confident and clear-sighted contributions to the discussion. The very good provision of a wide selection of extracts from well respected historians meant that students were clearly aware of the range of historical interpretations

and referred to these effectively; they worked hard and showed very good skills in assimilating and using a wide range of information. The course in **classical civilisation** covers many aspects of the classical world from Roman Britain to Greek tragedy. There was excellent teaching and learning in the sampled lesson which was part of the study of Euripedes' *The Bacchae*. The teacher's expert knowledge and teaching skills excited, stimulated and led students in their intellectual development at a fast pace, with excellent relationships encouraging first-rate discussion and high level exchanges.

## Geography

Provision in geography is **excellent**.

### Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high as a result of excellent teaching.
- Students' knowledge and understanding of topics is enhanced through the wide range of curricular links, including fieldwork.
- Standards in coursework are very high because teachers set rigorous targets and expect students to meet them.
- Students are achieving very well because of the excellent guidance they receive.
- Leadership and management are excellent.

### Commentary

140. Results in the 2004 A level examination were very high compared to the national average with most students achieving grade A or B. The results have been high over recent years, and were even higher in 2004. Overall, students achieved better in geography than they did in the other subjects they took.
141. By the end of Year 13, students have a wide range of knowledge of topics about the physical and human environment. They are knowledgeable about world-wide issues such as population growth in China and how countries manage the economic and social implications of change. They understand the reasons and consequences for natural hazards, such as flooding in Bangladesh and how the more economically developed countries are better able to prepare and respond to such events. Many students, particularly the most gifted and talented students, enhance the quality of work through knowledge of places to support theoretical study. Coursework is a very high standard. Good research skills are evident in environmental investigations at Bovey Tracey. Students employ a range of appropriate techniques and use ICT well to present findings. Written work is well structured and evaluations are well explained, though some lower attaining students do not always make full enough use of case study information in assignments. Nonetheless, overall achievement is excellent, leading to the very high standards of nearly all students.
142. Teachers have an excellent understanding of topics and of the course requirements and this leads to students making rapid advances in developing their question answering skills. Lessons are very well prepared and incorporate challenging tasks that provide opportunity for initiative and self reliance. As a result, students gain confidence in researching topics and become skilled as independent learners. Teachers provide first class guidance in coursework so that students understand what is expected of them. They rise to the challenge and it leads to them producing high quality and well analysed accounts. Learning is very much enhanced through contacts

with local universities, the farming and business community and it results in students improving their understanding of the practical applications of study, such as sustainable agriculture on Dartmoor.

143. The leadership and management of the subject are dynamic, with students benefiting greatly from this excellence. The subject is at the forefront of educational initiatives and developments. It is the base for the south west branch of the Geographical Association and students regularly participate in competitions organised by the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors. Students run the daily 'Traidcraft' stall and this helps others to be better informed about world trade issues. Teachers are well supported through the very good opportunities to upgrade their skills. Relationships are excellent and students' morale is very high. The subject has made very good progress since the previous inspection, particularly in maintaining the very high standards and in the excellent teaching of the subject.

## **Religious education**

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

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- The school's approach to providing the statutory entitlement of religious education for all students is very effective.
- Students reach very high standards in examinations in religious education and in the provision for all students.
- Achievement is very good because teaching and learning are stimulating.
- The subject is very well led.

## **Commentary**

144. At the last inspection the school offered a specific general course as a means of providing the statutory entitlement in religious education for all students in a school sixth form. This followed the requirements of the Devon, Plymouth and Torbay Agreed Syllabus and students met its expectations. A different but equally valid approach obtains today, whereby studies link to each of the students' accredited subjects and also to personal development and community activities; this approach is further enhanced by day conferences. This approach has found much favour with the students, who speak knowledgeably about a wide range of issues they have studied such as the ethics of the human genome project in biology, the religious impact of colonisation in geography and the conflict between materialism and spiritual needs in classics. Specific sessions on medical ethics appeal especially to those applying for medical degree courses but are open to all to contribute to broader awareness.
145. The Agreed Syllabus gives no detailed assessment criteria at this level. However, by Year 13, students' understanding, evaluation and application of their studies to appropriate contexts appear very high in comparison with typical students of their age. At the last inspection standards were above average; clearly, students are now achieving very well. In addition to the provision that is made for all students, a highly successful A level course is taken by a number of students. In 2003, as at the time of the previous inspection, about half the candidates obtained grades A or B. In 2004 nearly nine out of 10 did so, sustaining their high standards at AS level, and

demonstrating very good achievement. These standards are very high, and present work matches these very high standards.

146. Students themselves ascribe much of their success to the frequent discussions and debates characteristic of their lessons in the subject, where they propose and defend different stances and learn from the arguments. In these A level lessons, the brisk interaction between students and teacher, probing questioning and challenging applications of theory to the real world make studies vivid. Detailed assessment and feedback shows students clearly how to improve: in Year 12 students need prompting to consider less obvious implications of decisions based on beliefs. By Year 13 they have learned to anticipate objections.
147. Subject leadership is very good because provision matches students' needs very well and enables them to reach the highest levels. The rise in standards and achievement since the last inspection demonstrates very good improvement.

## **Psychology**

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

### **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Teaching is very good, with a strong teaching team enabling students to achieve very well.
- Teachers use their examiner and moderator experience to help students obtain well above average results.
- Students show a mature and intelligent approach and good study skills in a variety of learning situations.
- Teaching rooms are inadequately equipped and, in some cases, too small for the large numbers now taking the subject.

## **Commentary**

148. Standards at A level in 2004 were well above average and students achieved very well, with most doing better than expected in relation to their overall GCSE results. Since the subject was introduced in 2000, there has been a pass rate of 100 per cent; improving numbers of students have achieved the top grades of A and B, with 66 per cent achieving those grades in 2004. Results at AS level have been equally impressive with nearly all students achieving a pass and about twice the national average achieving grades A and B. The subject is attracting very large numbers of students, which has restricted the numbers from the boys' grammar school who are able to take the subject.
149. Standards of current students in their class work are well above average. Achievement is very good overall, but it is occasionally only satisfactory when students are not sufficiently stretched by the lesson. At present, opportunities for stimulating work are more restricted than normal as the department is currently without two of the three regular teachers. The remaining part-time member of staff is doing very well to maintain work and morale, but the situation is not sustainable in the longer term. Students' written work, which reflects the efforts of all the teaching team, is of high quality. It is well presented, practically error free, and shows good use of internet and



written resources. There is clear improvement in standards of work between Years 12 and 13.

150. Taking all evidence into consideration, teaching is very good overall, with very good planning. During the inspection it was only possible to see the work of two teachers, one of whom was a new and temporary member of the team. The rich diversity of opportunities involves all students and provides practical experience of psychological tests and inventories, such as those used in assessing stress levels, as well as discussion, written work, some group work and evaluation of research. Students discuss their feelings and views in an adult way because teachers create an atmosphere of trust in which this can happen.
151. As a result of the very good teaching in this atmosphere of trust and diversity of opportunities, learning is very good. Students are articulate, assimilate information, record and recall it accurately and apply it intelligently. Their response to the wide range of learning strategies is mature and demonstrates both good understanding of the subject and the study skills necessary to progress. They research information purposefully and seriously. They show their comprehension of the taught material through their active exploration of topics beyond the strict parameters of the syllabus; this was very apparent in a Year 13 class discussing the ethics of attempting to diagnose and treat early signs of schizophrenia.
152. Leadership and management are very good. The team is experienced in examination and moderation work and this is used in the planning and development of teaching. An excellent bank of teaching materials has been put together which provides a very sound basis for revision and further work. A thorough system for target setting and subsequent monitoring of performance has been developed. Regular opportunities are taken by staff to keep abreast of subject developments. Students are given the opportunity to attend revision courses and seek relevant work experience to support their career and higher education choices, though there is scope for an extension of the current contacts with professional psychologists. A major problem is that some subject rooms are too small for the size of groups and all lack ready access to internet, intranet and multimedia facilities. Because of this, the amount of group work and the range of research work in lessons are restricted.

## VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art, but drama and media studies are also taught, and both subjects were sampled. Teaching and learning were good in the sampled **drama** lesson; the students responded well to the relaxed and informal atmosphere and showed a good grasp of the concepts underlying the aspects of the director's role that were being discussed; however, a tighter focus and greater pace, with more variety of work, would have raised the level of the lesson. Nonetheless, students demonstrated a real sense of involvement in the subject. The **media studies** lesson exploring why the media uses stereotypes was excellent. With very good planning for fast pace, the teacher and students worked in very close partnership, sharing and discussing ideas; the calibre of debate was excellent, sharply focused and perceptive.

### Art

Provision in art is **very good**.

## **Main strengths and weaknesses**

- Management and leadership of the courses are very good with an enthusiastic team that works well together.
- Students attain high grades at AS and A level, and their achievement is very good.
- Teaching is very good, encouraging originality and independent learning of a high quality.
- ICT and computer aided design opportunities are insufficient because of limited resources.
- There is no accommodation exclusively for sixth form use, and this is a constraint to learning and achievement.

## **Commentary**

153. Students follow very well planned and delivered courses at AS and A level in art and design and photography. A level examination results have been well above average in recent years with many very high grades achieved. Present students are producing work of a very high standard. Large scale paintings are based on direct observational drawing with especially good drawings of natural forms, including some highly detailed and well finished drawings of insects and skulls. These have been used very successfully, for example, as a basis for intriguing compositions for the theme 'strange combinations' where a very original approach has been used with an interesting amalgamation of the styles of Hyper-realism and Surrealism.
154. Students work extremely well together, and achievement is very good, with some that is excellent. In discussions, students show a clear understanding of the aims and objectives of the courses and a good knowledge of the assessment criteria. They spoke confidently about their work and their career intentions. The work of students on both art and photography courses shows the importance and value of well balanced composition, and the use of rhythm and pattern quality. Students' investigations into the use of media, and the exploration of styles and techniques are outstanding. Personal study projects are lively, well considered evaluations of the work and ideas of major artists. Strengths are in links to contextual studies, the high quality of direct observational drawing, imaginative use of colour, and the wide range of media used. Photography is highly imaginative, with strong compositional elements, and rich pattern quality. An area for development is the greater use of computer aided design software to manipulate images.
155. The quality of teaching is very good; because of this, students have excellent attitudes and they are very keen to learn. Their learning is very good. Practical work is carried out with enthusiasm, and students show initiative and originality in their ideas because of the encouragement they receive. Similarly, students' study skills and independent research are well developed as a result of the way they are taught. Courses are extremely well planned and presented, and all projects involve meaningful contextual links. All teachers have very good subject expertise and an excellent knowledge of the examination requirements and assessment criteria. Students are encouraged with high quality individual feedback, and regular reviews. Exciting tasks and interesting resources provide inspiration. A very productive, purposeful, creative environment has been established.
156. Leadership and management of the courses are very good, and the art teachers are very enthusiastic. Courses are greatly enhanced by gallery visits in this country and

abroad. There is very good teamwork and good relationships provide good role models for students. There are many links with other subject areas, and social, moral, and cultural connections, through project themes and extra-curricular activities. The department makes a good contribution to the personal development of students. The teachers understand the limitations of the accommodation and make effective use of the very confined space available, with no accommodation exclusively for sixth form use. Good improvements have been made since the previous inspection, and the numbers of students wishing to join the courses are increasing.

## **BUSINESS**

Business studies and economics are taught. Economics was not sampled, but one lesson of **business studies** was sampled. Students achieved well because of the detailed planning that went into the lesson and the care the teacher took to explain the importance of the topic; the teacher's very good subject knowledge meant that she made good use of questioning. Overall, teaching and learning were good, and the course provides a number of opportunities for students to engage with the business community through visits and visiting speakers.

## **PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND GENERAL PROGRAMMES**

Formal provision for sixth formers' personal development occurs fortnightly at the same time as for pupils in the rest of the school through a planned programme of **PSHE (personal, social and health education)** taught by tutors to their tutor groups. As the lesson did not take place during the inspection week, it was not possible to sample any lessons. However, the overall programme is well planned to cover a wide range of topics, including preparation for work and university entrance. Elements of citizenship are included under the broad theme of becoming an active citizen. Discussions with students indicate mixed views about the value of the overall programme, though all acknowledged that parts, particularly those relevant to their future careers, were useful.

Comments about provision for religious education in the sixth form are made in that section; although, at present, there is no formal taught general studies course, there is very extensive provision for students' personal development and general education in the very great range of activities and opportunities open to sixth formers. These activities and opportunities include sport and games. Some students undertake the Community Sports Leaders' Award (CSLA) and are involved with coaching primary school children; they also provide very good support for teachers with the extra-curricular sports programme by coaching younger pupils in school teams and clubs. Students' participation in a number of sports teams and activities is good. High attaining students are successful in a range of sports at area, county, and, sometimes, national levels ranging from hockey and netball to tennis and athletics.

## PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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

