

# INSPECTION REPORT

## **LA RETRAITE RC GIRLS' SCHOOL**

London SW12

LEA area: Lambeth

Unique reference number: 100637

Headteacher: Mrs M Howie

Reporting inspector: Jan Allcorn  
1068

Dates of inspection: 19 - 22 November 2002

Inspection number: 249732

Short inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Voluntary Aided

Age range of pupils: 11-18 years

Gender of pupils: Female

School address: Atkins Road

London

Postcode: SW12 0AB

Telephone number: 020 8673 5644

Fax number: 020 8675 8677

Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr C Corcoran

Date of previous inspection: December 1995

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

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14347	Joan Lindsay	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development Advice, support and guidance How well does the school work in partnership with parents and students
13122	Stephanie Matthews	Team inspector		
12336	Malcolm Overend	Team inspector		
30317	Liz Barthaud	Team Inspector	Business Studies 6 <sup>th</sup> Co-ordinator	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students Assessment Resources
20527	Brian King	Team Inspector	Mathematics	
3242	Michael Newman	Team Inspector	Biology	
20420	Stuart Rawcliffe	Team Inspector	Chemistry	
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

La Retraite is an 11-19 multi-ethnic comprehensive school, with 811 girls on roll. It is smaller than most secondary schools. Eighty-two percent of the girls are Roman Catholic, with the remainder from other Christian denominations. Girls attend the school from a wide area, although the majority is from the inner London borough of Lambeth. They come from a wide range of social, cultural and economic backgrounds and the proportion eligible for free school meals is above that nationally and indicates some disadvantage. The main ethnic groups are Black British/African; White British/Irish and other White; and Black British/Caribbean. A small number of pupils are refugees and are mainly from South America. A much higher proportion of pupils than nationally do not have English as their first language, with one in twenty at the early stages of learning English. Pupils' attainment on entry has risen over the last few years and is now just above average overall, but with few girls at the highest levels of attainment. The school is currently involved in the national Excellence in Cities programme, which provides funding for work with gifted and talented pupils, pupils with special educational needs and for learning mentors.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

La Retraite is a very successful and popular school. Parents value very much the high expectations of the school, both academic and personal, for their daughters and the very good care and support given to them. Inspectors very much agree and found these positive views reflected in the very good GCSE results pupils gain and the mature and responsible way they behave both in and around the school. The headteacher, senior management and staff of the school all contribute to these high standards through their commitment, hard work and the clear promotion of the values of the catholic faith in all they do. The governing body is very supportive. Funding is much higher than that of most schools, because of the additional grants the school receives. It is spent well. The school provides good value for money.

#### **What the school does well**

- Overall performance at GCSE has been well above that nationally for the last three years and represents very good achievement since the age of eleven years.
- The girls have very good attitudes towards learning, behave well, and work hard. This makes a very positive contribution to the standards they achieve.
- The headteacher and senior managers have high expectations of work and behaviour and provide a secure and caring learning environment that enables all girls to achieve well both academically and personally.
- The school provides a very good range of learning opportunities that meet each individual girl's personal and academic needs.
- The school's very good procedures for monitoring the girls' attainment and progress and setting them targets are particular strengths of the good teaching the girls receive.

#### **What could be improved**

- The range of learning styles pupils experience in Years 7-11 insufficiently develops the more demanding study skills required for advanced studies in the sixth form.
- The guidance on careers does not meet fully the needs of those of girls who do not plan to go on to further study and training and University.
- Girls would value more opportunities to contribute to the life and work of the school both in the main school and the sixth form.

*The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.*

## HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

Since the school was last inspected in 1995, a significant number of changes and developments have taken place in its work. These have improved the quality of education offered to its pupils and students. Consequently, overall improvement has been good. The major change has been the opening of the sixth form in 1997. This has had a positive impact on the work of the school by raising the girls' expectations of what they can achieve. Although there was a drop in examination results following the last inspection, this was quickly reversed. In 1999, the school was one of the 100 most improved schools in England. For GCSE results in summer 2000 and summer 2001, the school gained DfES achievement awards. Five areas for improvement were identified at the time of the last inspection. Assessment and target setting are now very good. Management structures are clearer, monitoring and evaluation of the school's work are better and departmental self-review is developing well. The school recognises and celebrates well the diversity of cultures represented in the school population. Opportunities for pupils to voice 'views' on the work of the school are still not as strong as they could be, although in recent years the pupils' opinions have been sought through questionnaires. The school continues very actively to seek ways in which to improve its work further, such as applying for specialist science status.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by pupils at the end of Year 11 and students at the end of Year 13 based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			Similar schools
	2000	2001	2002	2002
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A*
A-levels/AS-levels	D	D	#	

Key	
very good	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

*Similar schools are those with an equivalent proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals.  
#National comparison data for AS/A level results in 2002 are not yet available.*

By the time they leave school at age 16 years the pupils have made very good progress overall. Performance at GCSE is the best in Lambeth for a state school and is very high when compared to that of similar schools nationally. Progress is very good in English and good in mathematics and science. It is better for pupils in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7-9. The trend of improvement is above that nationally and the school meets the ambitious targets that it sets itself.

In both summer 2001 and 2002, the overall performance in National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds was above that nationally and very high in comparison with that of similar schools. This represents good achievement given the girls' average attainment on entry to the school. Pupils do best in English, with performance above that nationally for girls. In mathematics and science performance is in line with results nationally and is improving.

In summer 2002, nearly all pupils gained five or more GCSE A\*-G passes. This well above average performance included good pass rates in English, mathematics and science, with results at the higher A\*-C grades in these subjects much better than for similar schools. This is a very creditable achievement and reflects the very good progress made by all pupils including those with special educational needs and English as an additional language. Outstanding results were obtained in history and theatre studies and above average results in most other subjects. Few pupils gained the higher A\*-C grades in French, although the results were satisfactory in relation to pupils' previous achievements in the subject.

Performance in advanced-level examinations represents good achievement for many students, as they often start the courses with the minimum standard required. Pass rates are good in most subjects. However few students gain the highest A-B grades and consequently overall performance in 2001 was

below that nationally. Results for summer 2002 were similar, but national figures have yet to be validated for purposes of comparison.

Throughout the school standards seen during the inspection reflect the 2001 and 2002 examination results. Pupils develop good literacy, and information and communication technology skills and sound numeracy skills.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good. The girls enjoy school and want to do well. They would recommend it to their friends.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good. The girls listen carefully in lessons and work hard. This makes a significant contribution to the good results they achieve at GCSE. They can occasionally be boisterous when moving around the school, but this is very good-natured. Exclusions are low when compared to national figures.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils from different cultures, backgrounds, and races get on well with each other. They support and care for each other.
Attendance	Very good in Years 7-11 because of the very good procedures the school has in place and its high expectations of attendance and punctuality. It is unsatisfactory in the sixth form because of the poor attendance of a few girls.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Good	Good	Good

*Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.*

Teaching is good overall. Nearly all lessons seen were satisfactory or better and over half were good or better. All lessons seen in the sixth form were at least satisfactory and a high proportion was good or very good. Scrutiny of pupils' books indicates good progress over time. Strengths of the teaching are the teachers' very good subject knowledge, the careful planning of lessons and the teachers' high expectations of what the pupils can attain. The school's very good systems for tracking pupils' attainment and progress ensure pupils know the targets they are expected to achieve. Marking and feedback clearly tell them how they can improve and pupils use this knowledge well. Pupils learn best when teachers probe their understanding through questioning which asks them to explain their answers and through activities where they explore new ideas for themselves and reach their own conclusions. Homework is set regularly and done conscientiously by most pupils. Although it is good, the teaching does not always help pupils to gain the higher order skills of independent research, analysis, problem solving and systematic evaluation that enable them to achieve the highest GCSE A\*/A grades and provide a firm foundation for sixth form study.

Good support in lessons helps pupils with English as an additional language and special educational needs to do well. However, the deployment of support staff in lessons does not always ensure their most efficient and effective use. For the same group, there are sometimes at least three support staff in lessons and at other times none.

Training in the national strategies for literacy and numeracy has had a good impact on teaching in English and mathematics and some very good practice was seen.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Very good. The school provides a well balanced range of learning activities that meet very well individual pupils' needs. The gifted and talented have opportunities to achieve at the highest levels and those with learning difficulties receive good support. Extra curricular provision is good.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Individual pupils' needs, whether learning or behavioural, are identified well and clearly met. The effectiveness of provision is shown by nearly all these pupils gaining five or more GCSE passes.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Very good. Pupils who enter the school with little or no English make very good progress and achieve well. They are assessed effectively on entry and their progress is tracked carefully. Guidance for subject areas is very good.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. A well planned PSHE programme plus good opportunities to work together, care about others and to experience the theatre and the arts significantly contribute to pupils' personal development. Citizenship is well planned. The spiritual life of the school is well reflected throughout its work.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Very well indeed. It provides a secure and safe learning environment. Each pupil is well known and good monitoring of progress and effective links with parents ensure that any difficulties are quickly resolved.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. The headteacher provides very good leadership and, with her senior managers, continually seeks ways in which to expand the opportunities available to the girls. Each girl is valued. The school has a climate of high expectations of work and behaviour.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very well in most instances. They oversee the work of the school well and know its strengths and weaknesses. They are very supportive of the headteacher and staff and of all they try to do. However they do not yet monitor sufficiently some aspects of the school's work and, currently, a small number of statutory requirements are not fully met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Teaching and learning are well monitored, with clear procedures to ensure that action is taken. Individual departments identify annually strengths and weaknesses in their performance and strategies for further improvement.
The strategic use of resources	The school is very good at using the additional grants and funds available to achieve its aims. Spending is well monitored. The school clearly seeks the best value in all it does. Given the very good progress of pupils and the cost effectiveness of the sixth form it provides good value for money.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The high expectations of the school for work and behaviour</li> <li>• The happy learning environment</li> <li>• The high level of care and support their daughters receive</li> <li>• The very good standards their daughters achieve</li> <li>• The willingness of staff 'to go that extra mile'.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There were no significant areas identified by parents. One or two had a few minor concerns.</li> </ul>

*72 parents returned the questionnaire and 24 attended the parents' meeting.*

Parents expressed very positive views about the work of the school. Parents who replied to the questionnaire and attended the parents' meeting were unanimous in expressing their high level of satisfaction with the high expectations of the school for the girls' work and behaviour. They think the school is well managed and led. Parents at the meeting were particularly appreciative of the quick response they receive to telephone calls and how well any incidents are dealt with. Parents feel comfortable at approaching the school with any concerns, and comment how helpful the school is. A few Year 7 parents would have liked a meeting with the school in the first half-term.

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this smaller-than-average, 11-19 comprehensive school has 142 girls on roll and is equivalent in size to most sixth forms nationally. The proportion of girls with English as an additional language is high and a few are at the early stage of learning English. Five girls have a statement of educational need. Over half the girls take advantage of the educational maintenance grant available for post 16 students. The school offers a good range of courses, 22 advanced level courses, vocational courses in business and health and social care, and a programme of community work, activities or sport that aims to broaden the girls' studies. Overall attainment for girls entering the sixth form is below that expected nationally for the advanced courses they take, in spite of the school's good GCSE results. A small but significant number of the most successful GCSE pupils decide to continue their studies elsewhere. Over 70 per cent of Year 13 students go to university or to other institutions of further and higher education.

### HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

La Retraite sixth form is cost effective, provides good value for money and is very well led and managed. Although overall performance is just below that nationally, students achieve well given their attainment on entering the sixth form. The school has high expectations for the students and supports them very well. Teaching is good and students have very positive attitudes to their work. The wide range of courses offered meets well the different interests and aptitudes of most students. Very good provision is made for students' personal development including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The continued growth in the number of students entering the sixth form reflects the overall good quality of provision.

#### Strengths

- Achievement in relation to prior attainment is good overall.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form promote very effectively the students' positive attitudes to their work and the school.
- Teachers have very good relationships with students and provide very good support that meets each individual girl's learning and personal needs.
- Teaching and learning, particularly in biology, business, English, history, theatre studies and sociology, are good or better.
- Procedures for monitoring and supporting the academic progress of all students are very good and help the students to know what to do to improve.
- Personal, spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of students is very good and results in mature and confident young people who take a pride in the school and their achievements.

#### What could be improved

- The numbers of students who complete successfully advanced courses in mathematics and physics are low.
- The current organisation and teaching of the advanced general studies course and the key skills course, especially for numeracy, do not ensure that all students achieve the best possible results.
- Not all subjects provide sufficient opportunities and encouragement for students to develop a more independent approach to their studies.
- Careers education and guidance for students who do not wish to go to University or on to further study are somewhat limited.

*The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. Strengths and areas for improvement in individual subjects are identified in the sections on individual subjects in the full report.*

### THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

The table below shows overall judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses that were inspected in the sixth form. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Standards in both the AS and A2 courses are below national averages. The recently appointed head of department and second in department provide good leadership and as a result students now make good progress and standards are rising.
Biology	<b>Good.</b> Standards achieved are satisfactory. Good teaching results in good learning. Curriculum provision and procedures for assessing students learning are good.
Chemistry	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Progress is satisfactory, although standards are below those expected nationally on the advanced level courses. Whilst teaching is sound overall, it does not probe students' understanding sufficiently to raise standards higher.
Theatre Studies	<b>Good.</b> Students are very positive about the subject and make good progress because of the good teaching they receive. Standards are currently in line with national expectations.
Business Studies	<b>Good.</b> Standards are in line with the national averages and students achieve very well in relation to their prior attainment. This is the result of very good teaching and leadership and management of the department.
History	<b>Very good.</b> Good examination results are achieved as a result of very good teaching. Teachers are enthusiastic and make use of a wide range of teaching styles during lessons.
Sociology	<b>Very good.</b> Students achieve good examination results because of the very good teaching they receive. They benefit from the good planning, knowledge and support of their teachers.
English	<b>Good.</b> Positive student attitudes and good teaching result in students making good progress in this subject. Standards are at expected levels.
French	<b>Satisfactory</b> with the potential for improvement. Few students take French in the sixth form and results are overall at the lower pass grades. Achievement is satisfactory but the students' knowledge of events for discussion work and of basic grammar is not good enough for the best possible progress.

Work was sampled in other subjects during the inspection week. The quality of teaching and learning was good overall. Year 12 psychology students showed a good knowledge of work covered so far. A very good lesson was seen with a Year 13 government and politics group. Provision in physics was satisfactory overall, although few girls take the subject and recent results have been disappointing. The key skills programmes for communication and for information and communication technology are much better planned and delivered than the numeracy programme, where the needs of mixed ability groups are not well met. The community and personal activities and sports programme on a Wednesday afternoon makes a very good contribution to students' personal development.

#### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Very well. All teachers have a strong commitment to the success of their students. The half-termly system for assessing the individual progress made by each student provides very effective support and guidance. Support for students with special educational needs and English as an additional language is good. Careers guidance for students in Year 13, who are applying for a university place, is very good. However, for students who wish to explore other routes to their chosen careers and to enter the world of work, guidance is more limited.

Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management of the sixth form are very good and make a major contribution to the good progress and very good attitudes to work displayed by all students. Expectations of students are high both academically and personally and this gives them the confidence to pursue their ambitions. The sixth form is cost effective.
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### STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

*124 out of 142 student questionnaires were returned.*

<b>What students like about the sixth form</b>	<b>What they feel could be improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good teaching</li> <li>• Teachers are supportive and accessible for help</li> <li>• Welcoming atmosphere</li> <li>• Opportunities for independent study</li> <li>• They are kept well informed of their progress</li> <li>• Small classes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Range of subjects on offer</li> <li>• Careers advice and guidance</li> <li>• Opportunities in Year 12 to take on more responsibility in the school</li> <li>• Accommodation</li> </ul>

The inspection evidence supports the strengths identified by students and three of the areas identified for improvement. These are the limited range of careers advice and guidance and the opportunities for Year 12 students to take on responsibility. Accommodation is variable. It ranges from bright, airy and purpose built spaces for mathematics and the sciences to more cramped accommodation in subjects such as business studies and sociology, which can limit opportunities for group activities. The inspection team does not support the negative view about the range of subjects offered. It is very good for a small school.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

**Overall performance at GCSE has been well above that nationally for the last three years and represents very good achievement since the age of eleven years.**

1. Pupils' performance at GCSE was well above that nationally for all state schools for both summer 2001 and summer 2002. This places the school in the top 25 percent of all schools nationally and in the top five percent of schools with a similar proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals. When compared with girls' results nationally, the performance of girls at La Retraite is above average rather than well above. This is because girls perform better than boys do nationally. Nevertheless the school's results represent very good achievement indeed given that the girls entered the school with attainment just below the national average and with very few pupils in the highest ability bands. They are the best for a state school in Lambeth. Since 1997 the trend of improvement has been better than that nationally. In 1999 the school was one of the 100 most improved schools nationally and received DfES<sup>1</sup> achievement awards for the 2000 and 2001 results. Additionally, Beacon<sup>2</sup> status was awarded in 1999.
2. Results in National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds show an improving trend and one that is better than that nationally. In 2001 and 2002 overall performance was above the national average and reflects, in particular, improved results in mathematics and science and the fact that more pupils gained the higher grades. These performances were very high when compared with those for similar schools. This represents good progress since the pupils entered the school in Year 7. The girls do better in English than in mathematics and science with performance in English above or in line with that nationally for girls for the last three years. In mathematics and science performance for the last two years has been broadly in line with national averages for girls.
3. Assessments in the foundation subjects show performance for summer 2002 to be well above national levels in history, information and communication technology and modern foreign languages. They are above average in design and technology and in line for geography.
4. GCSE pass rates for pupils are high in the core subjects of English (including both the language and literature examinations), mathematics and science. In summer 2002, nearly every Year 11 pupil obtained a pass in all three subjects. This is a very creditable achievement. The proportion of pupils gaining the higher A\*-C grades is significantly above that nationally in English and in line with that nationally for mathematics and science. This represents excellent progress in English, especially given the high number of pupils in the school with English as an additional language. In mathematics and science progress is good at this higher level, although, overall, pupils do not do as well in these subjects as they do in most other subjects.
5. In history, geography, and theatre studies, GCSE results have been particularly good over the last three years. In summer 2002, all pupils entered for history achieved an A\*-C grade, as did nearly all pupils entered for theatre studies. Results in Spanish have also been good but reflect the very good grades obtained by a small but significant number of pupils who have Spanish as their first language. Performance at the higher A\*-C grades was also good in art, business studies, German and information and

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<sup>1</sup> DfES – Department for Education and Skills

<sup>2</sup> A school achieves Beacon status because of its good practice in specific aspects of its work

communication technology. Results in religious education were very good, particularly since a much higher proportion of pupils and a wider ability range take the subject than is the case nationally. Below average results were obtained in French and, although these were in line with predicted grades and the pupils' abilities, pupils did not do as well in this subject as they did in other subjects. Pupils who have other languages as their first language have the opportunity to take them at GCSE and most achieve very good grades.

6. The proportion of pupils gaining five or more GCSE grades G or better is well above that nationally and is evidence of the good to very good progress pupils with learning difficulties or English as an additional language make. Pupils also do well at the higher levels with the proportion gaining five or more grades A\*-C above the national average. However achievement at the highest A\*/A grades is slightly lower than that nationally. The very good progress that the pupils make is the result of good teaching and very good monitoring of their progress. Pupils know what is expected of them and work hard to achieve their targets. The school sets itself and the pupils ambitious targets and in 2002 these were nearly met.

**The girls have very good attitudes towards learning, behave well, and work hard. This makes a very positive contribution to the standards they achieve.**

7. Pupils interviewed and spoken to during the inspection week state they are happy in the school, like their teachers and enjoy their work. Comments at the meeting for parents and responses to the parents' questionnaires support this. One parent said that her daughter in Year 7 cannot wait to come to school. Year 7 pupils say that older pupils are 'nice'. The lowest attaining Year 11 pupils are clearly interested in continuing their studies into the sixth form. Pupils had very few comments about what they would like to see improved in the school, although the toilets and changing room facilities were mentioned. They understand and appreciate that the school wants the best for everyone, are confident that they are achieving well and know that the teachers are caring and supportive of them.
8. Behaviour in lessons is good. The girls generally settle quickly to work and listen carefully to their teachers. Work seen was well presented and completed. Where teaching is particularly good, pupils make very positive contributions to lessons and confidently explain the reasons behind the answers they give. The library, although small, is well used both during school time and after school. Around the school, behaviour is also good. It is sometimes boisterous but nevertheless good-natured. Pupils from different ethnic groups mix well and break and lunchtimes were observed by inspectors as good social occasions. Pupils are confident that any bullying will be dealt with well although only a few minor incidents were mentioned. They know the behaviour expected of them and what exclusions will be for. Relationships between the pupils themselves and between teachers and pupils are very good. Pupils are confident that, if they have any difficulties, whether personal or academic, they can go to teachers for help.

**The headteacher and senior managers have high expectations of work and behaviour and provide a secure and caring learning environment that enables all girls to achieve well both academically and personally.**

9. The leadership and management of the school are very good. The school's aims to create an environment, based on the values of the Catholic faith, where every girl can achieve academic excellence, enhance her personal qualities and take a positive role in society. In this it succeeds very well. Girls by the age of sixteen years are sensible

and responsible young people who have achieved much better than expected given their attainment at age eleven. Parents and pupils are happy that they have chosen La Retraite because of the care that is shown to each individual girl and the good standards that each achieves.

10. The senior management team of the school has recently been strengthened by the appointment of three assistant headteachers. The roles of these three members of staff have a clear focus on implementing the school's aims for each individual girl. They cover the enrichment of the curriculum, provision for the gifted and talented, the needs of those with learning and behavioural difficulties, the development of links with parents and the further improvement of the sixth form.
11. The school monitors and evaluates well its work. To ensure that its high expectations are implemented, the senior management of the school regularly reviews results in public examinations with heads of department. This year the process has moved further forward with heads of department completing a detailed self-review. Subject departments have a much greater responsibility for reviewing and managing their work since the last inspection. The new self-review process focuses clearly on improving pupils' achievement. Additionally, the senior management team has a clear programme for observing teaching and learning in the classroom. It reviews particular aspects of the school's work and findings are communicated to all staff. Each subject area is required to look at its own work on the basis of the findings and to respond to the headteacher on any action that it needs to take.
12. The school development plan sets clear targets for pupils' achievement in each subject. These are very specific and subject departments are expected to develop their own action plan to achieve them. The targets are based on the testing of pupils on entry to the school and their predicted grades in National Curriculum assessments at the age of 14 years, at GCSE and in the sixth form. Expectations of staff are very clear and are high. Staff have a high commitment to their work and respond well to the expectations of the headteacher and her senior management team, and this is reflected in the good standards seen during the inspection.
13. The school has very good procedures to monitor pupils' personal development and to provide the appropriate support. Heads of lower, middle and upper school play a clear role in the overall monitoring of pupils' academic and personal development and liaise closely with all other relevant personnel from the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) to the assistant headteacher responsible for social inclusion. The EWO keeps a very close watch on attendance and punctuality and follows up unexplained absences immediately. She is on site four days of the week and this has a positive impact on links between the school and the home. The special educational needs co-ordinator, school nurse, educational psychologist, learning mentors and EWO meet half-termly to share any concerns and to make sure no pupil or student needing support remains unidentified. Child protection procedures are well in place, and health and safety matters are well managed.
14. The school manages the budget very competently and, although many of its practices are not formalised in written documentation, the budget is used effectively to support the school's priorities. Governors keep a clear oversight and support the school in all it strives to achieve. The school makes good use of additional funds available to it. For example through the Eagle Project<sup>3</sup> pupils in Years 9-11 have the opportunity to visit a Cambridge College and to take part in master classes in science. The standards fund

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<sup>3</sup> The Eagle Project funds links between Lambeth students and St John's College Cambridge. It aims to encourage more students to apply to University.

is used to provide support for pupils with learning difficulties, in addition to that already in the budget. Excellence in Cities funding effectively supports underachieving pupils or those at risk from exclusion through learning mentors or specialist support programmes.

15. Girls in La Retraite are from a wide range of backgrounds. Most come from Lambeth, one of the more deprived London boroughs, a small number are refugees, a high number do not have English as their first language, some have difficulties in managing their behaviour and others have specific learning needs. The staff of the school work hard and very sensitively to ensure that all complete their formal education and achieve well and that the school, whatever the pupils' circumstances, is a happy place for all. As one parent said 'the staff are always prepared to go that extra mile'.

**The school provides a very good range of learning opportunities that meet each individual girl's personal and academic needs.**

16. The school plans and organises the curriculum to meet the range of interests and learning needs of all its pupils and this is effective in ensuring that all pupils achieve well by the age of sixteen years. Although pupils are grouped according to prior attainment inspectors found no evidence that this arrangement had any significantly adverse effects on the pupils' motivation or their achievements. Pupils are able to move between the groups and the arrangement enables a relatively small school to provide well for both the highest attaining girls and girls with learning difficulties. The curriculum offered is very good.
17. The school provides very well for pupils' personal development, including their spiritual, moral, social and cultural education. The personal, social and health education course covers an appropriate range of topics and the two lessons seen were well taught. Subject departments' schemes of work show clearly where the new requirements for citizenship education can be delivered and address issues such as civil rights and social justice. The school provides music scholarships for up to fourteen girls a year and this involves attendance one day a week after school at the music school, where the girls have the opportunity to learn instruments of their choice. Other girls also participate and the choir has sung at a number of public concerts, including two with the Bach Choir. Visits to the theatre and trips abroad expand pupils' knowledge and understanding of the world around them. The school celebrates well the diverse range of cultures in the school
18. Support for pupils with special educational needs, both learning and behavioural, is good with some significant strengths. In Years 7-9, pupils with learning difficulties are taught in smaller groups and they often have additional support in lessons. They take only one modern foreign language and have the opportunity to do extra work on their key skills of literacy and numeracy. One parent was particularly pleased at how this approach had improved her daughter's basic skills. As pupils move into their GCSE courses in Years 10 and 11, the timetable is constructed to allow pupils with learning difficulties to do fewer subjects and to use the additional time available to have support for work in other subjects. The introduction of vocational GCSE courses, such as health and social care, is popular and provides a good preparation for sixth form vocational studies for pupils for whom these courses are a more appropriate route to further and higher education. The work-related curriculum, for which the school has won an award, also makes a good contribution.
19. Girls who have difficulty in controlling their behaviour have the opportunity to work with learning mentors and to take part in a half-termly programme of yoga, drama and circle

time sessions in small groups. These sessions aim to give the girls the skills to manage their behaviour and to work co-operatively with other pupils. The school is very pleased with the results of these sessions. Girls in Year 11 who took these programmes when they were younger no longer have behaviour management difficulties. This work is closely linked to specific programmes for girls who have appeared before the governors' disciplinary committee and are at risk of exclusion.

20. Grouping of the most able girls together provides good opportunities for them to start higher level work in preparation for sixth form courses. In summer 2002, for the first time, two groups of Year 10 students took religious education and one group English Language. All achieved a pass at the higher A\*-C grades. Results for the group which took both English and religious education were particularly good, with over half the girls gaining A/A\* grades in both subjects. English literature work with these pupils showed a high level of independent learning and very good progress. The level of difficulty and challenge in the work was very appropriate. These pupils now follow courses in AS English and sociology in some of their English and religious education lessons. If they do not wish to follow an AS course they can spend extra time on other subjects or develop further their information and communication technology skills. The most able Year 11 pupils also take the three separate sciences of biology, chemistry and physics instead of double science. In this way the school hopes to increase the girls' confidence in the sciences, which will in turn lead to a greater take-up of sixth form mathematics and science courses and improved results. Inspectors did not have time to inspect these courses in depth. Although these initiatives appear promising, the school is not yet monitoring their effectiveness sufficiently well to ensure their aims will be achieved.
21. The school has a high proportion of girls with English as an additional language and information supplied by the school shows that these girls make very good progress. Beginners move quickly through the early stages of learning English and other pupils achieve well in National Curriculum tests for fourteen year olds and at GCSE. The support they receive is good. Many of the pupils at the early stages of learning English have Spanish or Portuguese as their first language. The ability of a number of support staff to speak one of these languages helps very much the induction of these girls to the work of the school. The English as an additional language department provides very good guidance for subject departments. For example, it explains why girls may make errors in writing because of the grammatical construction of their first language.
22. The school's curriculum organisation, whilst enabling it to target support at pupils with learning difficulties very effectively, does on occasions lead to situations where several learning assistants and occasionally a support assistant for pupils with English as an additional language are in the same lesson at the same time. On other occasions, there is no support. The school does not monitor carefully enough the deployment of its support staff to ensure their most efficient use.

**The school's very good procedures for monitoring the girls' attainment and progress and setting them targets are particular strengths of the good teaching the girls receive.**

23. Since the last inspection, the school has successfully improved its procedures for monitoring and assessing pupils' progress and the standards they achieve. The school uses this information to set targets for individual pupils in each subject area. This practice has had a positive effect on pupils' attainment and contributes well to the good progress that pupils' make. The school's good practice in this area has been

recognised by the achievement of Beacon status in 1999 and it receives a considerable number of visits from other educational providers to look at its work.

24. The school has a very comprehensive assessment and target setting policy. It sets out clearly what the policy aims to achieve, the principles on which assessment and target setting are based and the means by which its aims will be achieved. There are high expectations that departments put these procedures into practice and inspectors found ample evidence that they do so. The school uses its data on pupil and student performance and its target setting information to identify and explain any underachievement in public examination performance and why. The data also enables the progress of particular groups of pupils, such as those with English as an additional language, to be monitored.
25. Procedures to check the performance and progress of each individual pupil and sixth form student are clear and comprehensive. The school records the progress of each pupil and sixth form student every half-term against the targets set for them. Under-achievers are identified and appropriate support is provided. For example, after the Year 11 GCSE mock examinations, individual members of staff 'adopt' a girl not achieving her targets for mentoring and support. Heads of department oversee academic achievement in their subject area and heads of school monitor overall performance, including behaviour, through incident slips.
26. In discussion with pupils, it was very evident to inspectors that the pupils know what they are expected to achieve. Where practice is best, the girls also know how this can be accomplished. For example, Year 11 geography pupils know their expected GCSE grades, how well they are currently doing and, importantly, what they need to do to reach their expected grade e.g., "to manage essay writing time better" and "to give reasons for conclusions". Pupils commented that in chemistry they are given copies of the criteria for awarding GCSE coursework grades, which help them to complete their coursework to the best standard. Where target setting is less effective, pupils know that they have to work harder, but are unsure where to direct their efforts. Working with individual pupils on their targets is an area the school is appropriately continuing to develop.

## **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

**The range of learning styles pupils experience in Years 7-11 insufficiently develops the more demanding study skills required for advanced studies in the sixth form.**

27. Although teaching and learning in the main school were judged good overall, lesson observations indicate one particular weakness. Where teaching is particularly good, the pupils show the ability to explore new ideas for themselves without constant reference to the teacher for support. In other lessons, the girls do not develop or show the ability to work independently. As a consequence, they do not acquire sufficiently the skills required to achieve the highest GCSE A\*/A grades in all subjects, and to take the best advantage of their sixth form studies.
28. The girls behave and listen well in lessons. They take notes conscientiously and undertake the tasks set. However, they do not always readily volunteer answers to the teachers' questions and the teachers do not always probe pupils' understanding sufficiently by asking them to explain their answers or to express their own views. Too often the teacher takes answers from the one or two pupils who answer freely and allows other pupils to remain passive for a considerable period of time. Teachers do not take enough advantage of opportunities for pupils to work in pairs, make presentations, or to undertake research. As a result a significant number of girls take very little responsibility for their own learning and ask few questions of the teacher. They do not develop fully independent research skills, a range of approaches to problem solving and investigative work, the ability to analyse information and interpret their results and the confidence to present results with explanations for their answers. Too many girls expect to be informed of what they need to know and to be told what to do.

**The guidance on careers does not meet fully the needs of those of girls who do not plan to go on to further study and training and university.**

29. Discussions with pupils in the main school and students in the sixth form indicate that the range of support in careers education does not meet the needs of all pupils. Careers education is good for pupils and students who plan to go on to university or further and higher education courses. However, it does not currently include sufficient information for those pupils who plan to enter the world of work rather than continuing with their education post 16 years of age or into higher education at 18 or 19 years of age.
30. Not all Year 12 and 13 students had a careers interview in Year 11 because they had already expressed their intention to remain at school. The current Year 11 pupils are not fully aware of the process, which at this time only provides careers interviews for pupils who intend to leave school at sixteen years. Lack of funding is the reason given by the school for not providing careers interviews for all girls in Year 11. As a result of recent changes in responsibility, the careers room is not always open. Year 11 girls particularly commented on this.

**Girls would value more opportunities to contribute to the life and work of the school both in the main school and the sixth form.**

31. The last inspection report recommended that pupils and students be given a more formal voice in the daily life of the school and more opportunities to take responsibility. Although there has been improvement in this area of the school's work, pupils and students consider it could be better and inspectors agree. A school council has been

set up but meetings are held only once a term. Pupils and students want to contribute more to the work of the school and the school council would like to have a greater impact.

32. Opportunities for sixth form students to undertake responsibilities in the school are not well developed. All the prefects are from Year 13. Year 12 students consider that they are not given the opportunity to undertake tasks that would indicate their ability to be responsible and mature young people and to use the evidence in support of their university entrance applications. The roles undertaken by Year 13 students are limited and younger pupils appear unaware of who the prefects are.
33. The use of older students for mentoring younger ones is in its early stages. Year 11 pupils are unaware of a system for sixth formers to act as mentors to them to help them in their GCSE year. Some Year 11 pupils took part in a mentoring programme for Year 7 pupils in the summer term but this does not take place in the autumn and spring terms.
34. Pupils took part in the interview process for the new assistant headteachers and apparently asked searching questions. In the last year, pupils have also been consulted through questionnaires on homework and the new discipline policy. However overall the school does not take full advantage of the very positive attitudes the pupils and students bring to the school and their work.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

35. In order to maintain its current high standards and to improve further the pupils' and students' performance in public examinations the school should:

in both the main school and the sixth form:

- (1) Explore teaching and learning strategies that help pupils and students to develop the higher-order learning skills that enable them to achieve the highest A/A\* grades at GCSE and develop independent learning skills in the sixth form by :
  - ensuring all girls actively participate in all lessons
  - identifying and sharing the best classroom practice
  - putting into place as soon as possible its programme to develop the classroom observation skills of subject heads of department.  
(paragraphs 8, 27, 28, 40, 43, 76, 77, 84, 85, 89, 90, 91, 110, 111, 115, 124)
- (2) Provide more opportunities for pupils and students to contribute to the work of the school by:
  - giving Year 11 pupils and Year 12 students more opportunities to undertake responsibilities within the school
  - developing further pilot schemes for older pupils to mentor younger ones
  - ensuring that all pupils and students are aware of who are prefects and the work of the school council
  - expanding further initiatives such as the questionnaires on the work of the school and the involvement of the girls in staff interview procedures.  
(paragraphs 31-34, 44, 49, 50)
- (3) Expand the range of career's guidance for pupils and students by:
  - seeking outside advice and support on careers and training available for 16,17 and 18 year olds who want to enter the world of work and not continue with their education full-time
  - ensuring that talks, visits and opportunities to experience the world of work take into account the needs of girls who do not want to pursue their studies further.  
(paragraphs 29-30, 60, 62,)

in the sixth form

- (4) Improve student numbers and standards achieved in mathematics and physics by:
  - monitoring the take-up of sixth form courses by the most able Year 11 students
  - promoting more opportunities for students to gain investigative and problem solving skills.  
(paragraphs 37, 38, 43, 50, 74-80)
- (5) Improve performance at A-level in general studies, and the achievement of all students on the key skills course, especially numeracy by
  - reviewing the teaching strategies and organisation of the courses
  - reviewing whether the courses should be a requirement for all students
  - investigating the most effective means of teaching the numeracy course to mixed ability groups
  - putting into place clear strategies for monitoring the effectiveness of the courses.  
(paragraphs 37, 54, 78, 82, 83)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7-11	23
	Sixth form	43
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		30

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 7-11</b>							
Number	0	3	9	10	1	0	0
Percentage	0	13	39	44	4	0	0
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	0	14	15	14	0	0	0
Percentage	0	33	35	33	0	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for Years 7-11 and the sixth form here as each lesson represents more than four percentage points in the main school and 2 percentage points in the sixth form.

### Information about the school's pupils

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	669	142
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	172	37

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	16	5
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	96	5

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	422

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	20
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	30

## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.32
National comparative data	8.1

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.38
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

## Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2002	0	131	131

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	103	85	92
	Total	103	85	92
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	79 (84)	65 (70)	70 (68)
	National	66 (64)	67 (66)	66 (66)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	56 (55)	41 (40)	38 (29)
	National	32 (31)	45 (43)	33 (34)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	101	102	96
	Total	101	102	96
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	77 (82)	78 (74)	73 (66)
	National	67 (65)	70 (68)	67 (64)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	52 (56)	41 (40)	38 (35)
	National	31 (31)	44 (42)	34 (43)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

### Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2002	0	132	132

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	0	0	0
	Girls	80	130	130
	Total	80	130	130
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	62 (53)	98 (98)	98 (100)
	National	51 (48)	87 (91)	95 (96)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	44.5 (45.0)
	National	39.2 (39.0)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	0	N/a
	National		N/a

### Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13)

Results for summer 2001 (2002 not yet validated)		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	0	39	39
	Average point score per candidate	N/a	13.9(14.6)	13.9 (14.6)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (17.8)	18.9 (18.6)	18.9 (18.2)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
School	Number of candidates	0	39	39	0	7	7
	Average point score per candidate	N/a	12.5	12.5	N/a	7.7	7.7
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

*Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.*

### ***Ethnic background of pupils***

<b>Categories used in the Annual School Census</b>
White – British
White – Irish
White – any other White background
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean
Mixed – White and Black African
Mixed – White and Asian
Mixed – any other mixed background
Asian or Asian British - Indian
Asian or Asian British - Pakistani
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background
Black or Black British – Caribbean
Black or Black British – African
Black or Black British – any other Black background
Chinese
Any other ethnic group
No ethnic group recorded

### ***Exclusions in the last school year***

<b>No of pupils on roll</b>	<b>Number of fixed period exclusions</b>	<b>Number of permanent exclusions</b>
105	5	1
15	0	0
155	4	0
20	9	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
0	0	0
4	1	0
0	0	0
1	0	0
0	0	0
143	0	1
293	10	0
40	0	0
0	0	0
31	1	0
2	0	0

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

### ***Teachers and classes***

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	51.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	14.31

#### **Education support staff: Y7 – Y13**

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	411.25

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	72.2
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	25
Key Stage 4	20

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### ***Financial information***

Financial year	2001-2002
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	£
Total income	4128529.00
Total expenditure	4210529.00
Expenditure per pupil	5525.63
Balance brought forward from previous year	184283.00
Balance carried forward to next year	102283.00



### ***Recruitment of teachers***

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	17
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	18
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	1.4
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.4
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0.4

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	669
Number of questionnaires returned	72

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	67	28	4	0	1
My child is making good progress in school.	71	26	3	0	0
Behaviour in the school is good.	67	26	4	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	50	39	11	0	0
The teaching is good.	54	43	0	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	53	35	7	0	6
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	67	29	1	0	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	88	13	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	57	32	6	0	6
The school is well led and managed.	61	35	0	1	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	64	33	0	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	51	36	8	1	3

### Other issues raised by parents

Either on the questionnaires or at the parents' meeting very few parents expressed any concerns about the work of the school. They were very positive about the school's work.

The following were mentioned by one or two parents.

- Music scholarship girl does not enjoy music school.
- Daughter feels because she has problems with some subjects she gets less attention.
- Generally quality of teaching good, but some teachers boring.
- New art accommodation has unsatisfactory natural daylight.
- Minority of girls loud. Sometimes girls a little noisy on leaving school.
- Better range of clubs needed.

## **PART D: THE SIXTH FORM**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and students' achievements**

36. Although overall performance in advanced level courses was below that nationally in summer 2001, the students made at least satisfactory progress and often better, given their attainment on entry to the sixth form. Similar standards were obtained in summer 2002 although national figures have yet to be validated for purposes of comparison. Pass rates in most subjects are good but few students gain the highest A-B grades. This reflects the students' attainment on entry to the school and the sixth form. Data from the school shows that few of these A-level students were in the highest attainment bands on entry to the school in Year 7. Nevertheless the school's efforts ensured that they achieved very well by the age of sixteen years. However, a small but significant number of the most able pupils leave at sixteen years to follow courses elsewhere and other students start advanced level courses with lower grades than one might normally expect. As a result the attainment level of students on entry to the sixth form is overall below that expected for advanced level courses. Given this background, the students achieve well. Many gain qualifications and entry to higher education who might not have been expected to do so when they were younger. This is all very much due to the school's supportive learning environment and its high expectations and encouragement of what the girls can achieve. The school sets ambitious examination targets based on the students' previous performance at GCSE and most students achieve these by the end of Year 13.
37. In summer 2001 performance at A-level was in line with that nationally in art and design, biology and sociology, but below in chemistry and theatre studies, and well below in economics and business studies, English Literature, geography and mathematics. The small number of A-B grades lowers the overall performance in most subjects. Provisional figures for 2002 give the best results in sociology, history and English. Results in sociology were particularly good, with the proportion of A-B grades above the provisional national average. In both years, general studies results were poor. The school has a policy that all girls enter this course because of the breadth it gives to their studies. However, insufficient preparation for the examination and the low commitment of a significant proportion of girls led to poor results. For other subjects the number of students entered is too small for valid comparisons to be made with national figures.
38. The new AS (A-level subsidiary examinations) were first examined in summer 2001 and results for Year 12 students ranged from pass rates of 100 per cent in many subjects to low pass rates in mathematics and physics. Even though numbers were small in these two subjects, the results were still disappointing and continued to be so in 2002. As a result, very few students proceeded to the A2 courses in these subjects. In art, English Literature and sociology in summer 2002 the proportion of A-B grades was in line with provisional national figures. In most other subjects, pass rates were in line with or better than national figures but the proportion of A-B grades was below.
39. Vocational courses are popular and a significant number of girls study GNVQ (General National Vocational Qualification) intermediate courses, some to gain entry to the more demanding two year advanced courses. Pass rates are good. In 2001 there was a 100 per cent pass rate at the intermediate level in GNVQ business and GNVQ health and social care. In 2002, AVCE (Advanced Vocational Certificate of Education) subject results in business studies, health and social care and information and communication

technology represented very good achievement for the students taking the courses, especially for some who entered the sixth form with previous attainment much lower than expected for such courses.

40. Standards seen during the inspection for the nine subjects being inspected in depth were overall in line with those expected nationally, although they varied from above average to below national expectations. Achievement for most students is good, although this also varies across individual subjects. It is very good in sociology where standards are above average. It is good in biology, business studies, English, history and theatre studies where standards are at expected levels. In mathematics and chemistry progress is satisfactory rather than good and with overall standards below expected levels for the courses, because very few students will achieve the highest examination grades. Standards in French are below average because the students' basic grammar skills are weak. In other subjects sampled students were working at appropriate levels for the courses. Where students achieve well, the subjects are popular with students and the teaching is good or very good. The teachers work hard to develop the students' independent learning skills. Students with special educational needs and English as an additional language make good or better progress because they are well supported by their teachers and specialist staff. Where achievement is satisfactory rather than good the teaching does not probe students' understanding sufficiently or give them the skills to access and research new ideas for themselves.
41. The school entered most students for the key skills accreditations of communication, numeracy and information and communication technology in summer 2002. Most gained passes at level 2 and in communication half the candidates gained level 3, the highest award. The aim of the key skills courses was to help students increase their overall points score to meet University entrance requirements. (However, it has now been decided nationally not to include these results in the overall assessment of a school's performance.) For other students, the accreditation provides an alternative qualification to an A\*-C grade in English and mathematics for entrance to higher education courses. However, whilst the communication and the information and communication technology courses make a good contribution to the development of students' key skills, the numeracy work seen was not planned well enough to meet the wide range of learning needs found in the timetabled groups. Weaknesses in students' ability to apply numerical skills in other subjects were seen in biology and chemistry.

### **Students' attitudes, values and personal development**

42. Students' attitudes to their work and to school life are very good. In lessons they respond very well especially when the teaching is good and they are infected with the teacher's enthusiasm. This was evident in a business studies lesson on the subject of stakeholders. Students were interested throughout and happy to be involved such as by reading aloud. They responded very well to the teacher. Students spoken to during the inspection are pleased they made the decision to remain in the school and carry on into the sixth form and girls who arrived new to the sixth form from other schools are equally positive.
43. Students work hard and are keen to do well. However, they enter the sixth form with relatively weak independent learning skills and are not always accustomed to undertaking their own research, analysing information for themselves and making presentations to each other. In science, investigative and practical skills are not at the level required in Year 12. However, where subjects develop these skills well, such as in business studies and history, the students show they can work well independently. Other subjects such as mathematics give fewer opportunities to develop the higher

order learning skills required for success in advanced courses and in higher education. The need to give attention to the development of the students' independent learning skills initially can slow the progress they make in their sixth form studies.

44. Students are eager to take on responsible roles within the school and are given the opportunity to serve on the school council and, in Year 13, to be prefects, with one student voted into the role of president. However, there is scope to develop these opportunities further, particularly for Year 12 students. Both Year 12 and Year 13 students would like the opportunity to be more involved in the life of the school. They would like the role/post of prefect to carry greater responsibility and be one that younger pupils aspire to.
45. Students respond very positively to the community and personal activities, and sports programme that takes place each Wednesday afternoon. They are fully involved in activities such as dance and art or helping in a local primary school. Their personal development is enhanced further by the many interesting visits that are arranged for them, for example the Westminster 2002 Youth Conference and through the links with organisations such as the Young Vic theatre.
46. Students form constructive relationships amongst themselves, offering and receiving support in lessons and socially. This has a good effect on their learning. In a theatre studies lesson on Stanislavski's techniques the students co-operated well together so that the lesson was a positive experience for them. There is often a very good rapport with teaching staff who are respected by the students and this leads to a purposeful learning environment focused on each student achieving her personal best.
47. Attendance in the sixth form is below 90 per cent, in spite of the school's very good procedures to ensure that all girls attend regularly. It is, therefore, unsatisfactory overall. The figures are affected by a small number of students whose attendance falls below the expectations of the school.

#### **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

48. Teaching in the sixth form is good with some significant strengths. No unsatisfactory teaching was observed during the inspection. It is best in business studies, history and sociology, where it is very good and is reflected in the good to very good achievement of students in these subjects. It is good in English literature, biology and theatre studies. The teaching seen in mathematics was also good, but recent developments have yet to have an impact on the standards the girls achieve. In chemistry and French teaching was satisfactory. In other subjects sampled by inspectors very good teaching was seen in government and politics – it was at least satisfactory elsewhere and sometimes better.
49. The strengths in the teaching are the very good subject knowledge of the teachers and their very good lesson preparation. Where teaching is best, the teachers work hard to develop the ability of the students to research information for themselves, analyse it and reach their own conclusions. They do this through questioning which probes the students' understanding, asking the students to prepare presentations in pairs or individually, and expecting the students to sum up the key points of a lesson. Such strategies were particularly evident in English, history, sociology and theatre studies lessons, where the enthusiasm and encouragement of the teachers also made a significant contribution to the active participation of students. However the students have not always built up these skills sufficiently through earlier work in the school, and

the development of these important learning skills can inhibit the speed at which new work is covered.

50. In mathematics and the sciences, fewer opportunities are given for students to acquire the important learning skills referred to above. Opportunities to develop extended discussion are not taken and the students, whilst carefully taking notes and following what the teacher says, do not question the ideas being presented. The students are not required to explain their answers in depth to the teacher or each other. In biology and chemistry, a lack of practical skills was observed to slow the progress of the students, particularly in Year 12.
51. The use of information and communication technology was observed in a number of lessons and in the students' work. Good use of the interactive white boards in art for exploring Internet web-sites and in history to make power-point presentations stimulates learning. In science, the students use the Internet and word-processing, but the use of sensors and data logging is underdeveloped. The use of computers is also currently limited in mathematics, although new facilities are set to change this.
52. A particular strength of the teaching is the detailed monitoring of the students' attainment and progress with regular feedback through half-termly assessments. Students know clearly what they are expected to achieve and how well they are doing. Where this is followed through by teachers with marking and discussion that gives clear indications of how the students can improve, often related to examination criteria, the students achieve particularly well. Such practice makes a significant contribution to the good standards achieved in business studies, sociology and history. For example the sociology department has developed a handbook for students to support them in their work.
53. The special educational needs department and the English as an additional language department provide good support for students with a statement of need or who speak little English. Additional support sessions and guidance on essay writing help the students to cope with the written demands of the courses they take.
54. The teaching on the key skills courses of communication and of information and communication technology is well planned and appropriate. However, the teaching seen on the numeracy course did not fully meet the needs of the wide range of ability in the classes seen.

## **HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO STUDENTS?**

55. The sixth form curriculum provides a wide range of opportunities that meet very well the different interests and abilities of each student. Mid way through Year 11, pupils make an initial choice of the subjects they wish to study in the sixth form. Once the GCSE results have been published, each girl is interviewed to review her initial course selection in the light of the results achieved. Whilst the entry criteria for the sixth form is stated as five or more A\*-C grades at GCSE or 47 points and an attendance record of at least 90 per cent, the school does take individual circumstances into account.
56. The sixth form is still a relatively new development and when taking both this and the relatively small numbers of students into account, the curriculum offered is extensive. This is contrary to the view expressed by some students both in the questionnaire completed by Year 12 and Year 13 students prior to the inspection and during the inspection week. Twenty-two subjects are offered to either AS or A level. In addition,

courses leading to either an intermediate GNVQ or AVCE qualification in business studies or health and social care are offered. The majority of students in Year 12 follow a course leading to a key skills qualification in communication, numeracy and information and communication technology. During the summer term of Year 13, there is an opportunity for students to complete a general studies advanced level course. The statutory requirement for religious education for all sixth form students is not met, although a significant number achieve an AS qualification in the subject and experience a greater depth of study than found in most schools.

57. The personal and social education programme followed by the students promotes their cultural, moral and social development, as does work in English, French, history, sociology and theatre studies. In addition to this, each Wednesday afternoon, students choose an activity to follow which is not related to their examination courses. Twelve activities are currently offered ranging from off-site activities such as working in a primary school to on-site activities such as making jewellery. Fourteen girls are undertaking the Duke of Edinburgh's Gold Award. The activities seen by the inspectors were making a good contribution to students' personal development. Students writing and producing a Christmas pantomime were learning how to work collaboratively together and to share and support each other's ideas.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?**

### **Assessment**

58. The school's assessment procedures are very effective and make a significant contribution to the good progress that the students make. An extensive range of data is collected on the students as they move through their sixth form courses. For each student, attendance, punctuality and progress in each subject is reported on each half term. Both subject staff and form tutors use this information to guide students through their courses and to identify any additional support needed. Students are very appreciative of the support they get and the willingness of teachers to give extra time to help them.
59. The school uses well data on the students' performance at GCSE to predict their individual results on advanced and vocational courses. Not only are subject staff informed of these but also the students themselves. Students know clearly their targets and half-termly assessments are matched against these. Most departments' assessment procedures and the use of these to inform their teaching are at least good and in some instances very good. Teachers give good feedback to students on their work and clear guidance on how they can improve. For example in history examination mark schemes are used in lessons to help the students understand what they need to do to gain the highest grades. Detailed marking in English is very effective in helping students to know what to do to improve. In sociology marking is diagnostic and compares the student's target grade to the grade achieved. Assessment procedures and their use are less well developed in mathematics and chemistry.

### **Advice, support and guidance**

60. The school has very good procedures for ensuring the students' safety and welfare. Child protection lines of responsibility are very well established and clear to all members of staff. The different procedures that need to be adopted for young people over 16 are understood well by the staff concerned. Other aspects of health and safety are good, for example, the risk assessment that is carried out both on the school premises and before any outside visit. Students receive good levels of pastoral support that is effective because of the caring attitudes of staff, who are united in aiming for

every student to achieve to the best of her abilities. As a result, students have the opportunity to seek additional support from learning mentors, the school nurse and the educational welfare officer as well as outside agencies. For a significant number of girls, remaining in full time education after the age of sixteen years is not easy, and without the support and help of the school some might not complete their courses successfully. Over half the girls in the sixth form claim an educational maintenance grant.

61. Good provision is made for students with special educational needs and students with a statement of need are well integrated. Students entering the sixth form with little English are supported well not only by staff but by other students. A small number of students enter the sixth form from other schools and from abroad. These students are welcomed and their particular needs met.
62. Currently, the careers advice and guidance offered to students is limited to university course exploration and application. Through its links with higher education, for example, St. John's College Cambridge and the University of Kingston, the school gives very good support to students who wish to go on to university. However, the careers advice for those not wishing to go on to Higher Education is less well developed and is largely based on information the individual student can obtain from the careers library. There is no structured provision for those who may want to pursue alternative career paths. In the questionnaires completed by students prior to the inspection this was identified as an area of the sixth form curriculum they would like to see improved. Inspection evidence supports this.
63. The school has good procedures for monitoring and improving attendance. Students must have a good attendance record as a condition of entry to the sixth form and the expectations are outlined clearly before students arrive. If students do not comply, their parents are informed and the matter may be referred to the educational welfare officer. In some cases students may be put on punctuality or attendance report but the emphasis is very much on encouraging the students to attend by addressing any problems they may have. In spite of the school's very good efforts however a small number of girls have a poor record and this makes the overall attendance unsatisfactory.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?**

64. Overall, students who completed the pre-inspection questionnaire and who were spoken to during the inspection have positive views of the school. Students are particularly pleased by the way the school helps them to settle into the sixth form, the support that they receive and how well they are taught. Some students, particularly those in Year 13, do not feel well enough advised about future options, if they are not intending to go on to university. Inspection evidence bears out these views.
65. The school provides good information about the sixth form for both parents and students. Policies and procedures relating to the sixth form are clearly documented for and communicated to students and their tutors. The sixth form prospectus is reviewed and reprinted annually and provides very detailed information for students and parents. An open evening is held to which Year 11 pupils and their parents can find out about sixth-form courses. All Year 11 are encouraged to attend with their parents. The new collaborative arrangements with two other local schools for September 2003 are already being publicised. Although the school encourages students to remain at La

Retraite for their sixth form studies, it is supportive of students who wish to explore other alternatives.

66. Parents who attended the meeting for parents were very positive about the work of the sixth form.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

### **Leadership and management**

67. The school is very well led and the commitment of the headteacher, her staff and the governing body to provide the best education possible for the girls within a Christian community is strongly reflected in the school's decision to provide education post 16. Since the time of the last inspection La Retraite has opened a sixth form. This has successfully helped many girls gain vocational and advanced level qualifications that might not have been expected given their prior attainments. Although the school is smaller than average in size, it aims to provide a sixth form education that provides well for students from the gifted and talented to those with modest GCSE grades, learning difficulties and at the early stages of learning English. All are welcome. Sixth form students impressed inspectors with their maturity, ambition and will to succeed.
68. The sixth form has a positive impact on the work of the whole school. It provides a clear target for pupils in Years 7-11. Year 7 pupils interviewed already aim to go into the sixth form and hence to university. Lower attaining Year 11 pupils showed clear interest in the sixth form open evening and many indicate their intention to continue their education into the sixth form. The sixth form's existence helps to raise the expectations of the girls throughout the school as to what they can achieve.
69. The leadership and management of the sixth form are good and reflect the common vision and commitment to improvement and the raising of standards shown throughout the school. The current head of sixth form has been in post since September 2002 and is continuing well the work of the previous head of sixth form: together they have made a considerable contribution to the success of the sixth form. The school development plan is very clearly focused on both pupils in the main school and sixth form students achieving the highest possible standards. Clear and ambitious targets are set for all groups of girls and the outcomes recorded. In summer 2002 the school was close to its target for Year 13 students but below that for Year 12 students. The school is currently and appropriately reviewing its curriculum for 14-19 year olds and preparing for the collaboratively arrangements with two other local schools planned for September 2003. Both these initiatives are aimed at meeting better individual students' needs and raising standards further and they are well managed.
70. The head of sixth form works in a clear partnership with heads of department and tutors to ensure that an individual student's needs are met. Overall results and student progress are monitored closely. The management of sixth form courses by heads of department is good and particularly good in business studies, history, and sociology. It is at least satisfactory for other subjects. The variety of advanced and vocational courses provides good continuity from the Year 10 and 11 courses. Nearly all Year 11 students have appropriate courses that they can follow in the sixth form that enable them to remain at La Retraite if they wish to do so. These are well planned and delivered.
71. The sixth form is cost effective. It provides a range of appropriate courses and students make good progress overall. Many girls succeed beyond what their

attainment at eleven years would indicate and go onto further study at the age of 18 years. However, there is a need to address some aspects of the work of the sixth form though closer monitoring of teaching and learning. Religious education in the sixth form does not meet statutory requirements and the careers education and guidance programme is limited. The organisation and delivery of the current key skills programme is not monitored rigorously enough to ensure it is meeting the needs of all students. The time allocation and delivery of the A-level general studies programme requires review, as results are poor. A small but significant number of Year 11 pupils choose to pursue their sixth form studies in other schools. Indications are that these are the most successful GCSE students. The school does not yet sufficiently monitor the reasons for these choices and whether they are subject related.

## **Resources**

72. Staffing, resources and accommodation are good overall. All teachers who teach in the sixth form teach in the main school. Staff have good subject knowledge and skills and are appropriately deployed. The sixth form has its own library and common room facilities. Students also have good access to computers. Where accommodation is old and in need of refurbishment, there was little evidence of this having an adverse impact on the standards achieved. However in sociology and business studies the increasing numbers and lack of space will limit the range of teaching strategies that can be used.
73. Financial management throughout the school is very good and monies are used well to support the school's priorities. Additional funding available to the school through national and local initiatives is used effectively to expand each girl's vision of what she can achieve. Through visits to Universities and through summer school experiences the school gives girls the confidence to continue with their studies after the age of 18 years.

**PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM**

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

75. The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2002. National figures for 2002 are not yet validated and are therefore not included.

**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	3	100		0		1.3	
Biology	1	100		0		1.0	
Chemistry	1	100		0		1.0	
Christian Theology	12	100		25		2.75	
General Studies	25	24		0		0.24	
Mathematics	1	100		0		1.0	
Music	2	0		0		0	
Physics	1	100		0		1.0	
Sociology	5	80		0		0.8	
Sport and PE	2	50		0		1.0	

**GCE A level and AVCE courses**

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	6	50		0		1.3	
Biology	5	80		0		2.8	
Chemistry	3	100		100		2.0	
English Literature	13	100		15		4.2	
General Studies	33	24		0		0.5	
German	1	100		0		4.0	
Government and Politics	4	75		25		4.5	
History	7	100		29		5.7	
Mathematics	2	100		0		2	
Physics	1	0		0		0	
Sociology	18	94		61		6.7	
Spanish	2	100		100		9.0	

Theatre Studies	6	100		0		3.3	
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### **Intermediate and Advanced vocational qualifications**

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
AVCE Single Business	8	100		50		7.0	
AVCE Double Business	10	80		0		7.2	
AVCE Single Health and Social Care	4	75		0		1.5	
AVCE Single ICT	8	12.5		100		5.75	

## **SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS**

### **MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES**

76. The focus was on mathematics, biology and chemistry, but physics was also sampled. Numbers taking physics are small and results at both AS and A-level are at the lower grades or students fail to obtain a pass. Two lessons were sampled during the inspection. Both the lessons observed were satisfactory, but teachers did not discuss work in sufficient depth with students to deepen their understanding.

#### **Mathematics**

Overall, the quality of provision for mathematics is **satisfactory**.

#### **Strengths**

- Standards on advanced courses are beginning to rise under the new leadership.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and the teaching is good on the advanced courses.
- The marking of students' work is good and provides constructive support.
- Teacher-student relationships are good.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Results in AS and A-level examinations have been low in recent years.
- Questioning does not always present students with the opportunity for extended response and explanation.
- The quality of assessment and monitoring of students' progress requires further development.
- Courses and teaching for the key skills numeracy programme are not appropriately matched to the needs of the students.

77. Since the introduction of the sixth form in 1997, 13 students have completed the two year A-level mathematics course, all but one attaining at least a pass grade. However these numbers are low when compared with other subjects such as biology and English. The 2001 A-level results, and the provisional results for the two students examined in 2002, are satisfactory. AS-level grades in 2001 were poor and only two of the eight candidates who took the AS-level examinations in 2002 are proceeding to A2 standard. The rest have discontinued the subject. Results overall are below national averages, and students have not achieved as well in mathematics as in their other

subjects. However, when account is taken of the students' earlier GCSE mathematics background and of some staffing problems, performance is not significantly different to expectations.

78. From September 2002 a new head of mathematics and second in department have been in post and a sharper focus on advanced level work is evident. Standards are improving although still below those expected nationally overall. Modules in pure mathematics, mechanics, and statistics are taught, with decision mathematics likely to be introduced in 2003/4. Teachers' individual expertise is matched appropriately to the modules and the teachers exhibit very good subject knowledge. The scrutiny of work showed Year 12 with a sound understanding of early ideas in mechanics. However some of their algebraic work shows weaknesses. Year 13 students' work shows satisfactory progress with a sound understanding of statistical methods such as the Poisson distribution and hypothesis testing.
79. Teaching is good overall and sometimes better. There is confident delivery, detailed exposition and very good relationships with the students. These skills were evident in a Year 13 pure lesson on exponential and logarithmic expressions, a Year 12 statistics lesson on correlation, and a Year 12 co-ordinate geometry lesson. Questioning however tends to be insufficiently focused and girls are not challenged enough to explain answers. Besides students who achieve well at the GCSE higher level, the department accepts on advanced courses some girls who have done less well, such as a grade B at GCSE intermediate level. For these girls the transition often proves too great, even with support provided, and many tend to drop the subject either prior to or subsequent to the AS examination.
80. From inspection evidence, learning is good on current advanced courses. Students are attentive, respectful, responsible and courteous. They study conscientiously, have confidence in their teachers and achieve well. They set work out carefully and complete tasks diligently, so making good progress. They are prone, however, to accept information unquestioningly and are reluctant to challenge. Many students are articulate in one-to-one discussion but teacher-student exchanges tend to brevity rather than promotion of extended discussion or explanation. Development of the students as independent learners is thereby restricted. Work is suitably monitored and is fully marked with many constructive comments made. Students' work scrutinised showed very good notes, accompanied by good exemplars, and the exercises set were attempted well.
81. As part of the school's key skills programme the department teaches the application of number element but work seen during the inspection indicated some unsatisfactory practice. Timetable arrangements create mixed-ability groups and the teaching of these does not meet the needs of the students. In the lessons seen, some tasks were insufficiently challenging for the higher-attaining students, or proved difficult for the less able, some of whom for instance found multiplying 0.15 by 300 beyond their capability without use of a calculator. Most students can substitute in formulae satisfactorily, perform calculations, and they understand graphical processes and statistical display. The needs of the students with special educational needs or English as an additional language were not fully recognised, though in one class a support assistant did provide help. A review of the teaching styles and overall planning of this course is desirable.
82. The newly opened classroom block in which most mathematics lessons are taught provides better opportunities for the use of information and communication technology than previously. Students have better access to computers and staff are being trained in the use of the interactive whiteboard. These developments will support the use of

information and communication technology for the teaching of mathematics, which is currently underdeveloped.

83. The new head of department shows good leadership and management skills. The departmental self-assessment pack is a positive start to improve standards. Co-ordination of advanced-level work and the sharing of good practice are encouraged. A lesson observation programme is under way. Teachers have attended A-level module training courses, and standards are rising. An under-developed, but recognised area for improvement, is the assessment of students, the monitoring of their progress and target-setting. The proposed links with two other schools provide the department with further opportunities to move strongly forward and to establish significant growth in standards.

## **Biology**

Overall, the quality of provision in biology is **good**.

### **Strengths**

- Achievement is good in relation to students' prior attainment.
- Teaching and learning are good
- The leadership of the department is very good and the subject is increasing in popularity.
- Very good extracurricular links support students' learning and help future career decisions.
- Students have positive attitudes to the subject

### **Areas for development**

- Insufficiently developed data-handling skills, including the use of information and communication technology, and investigative skills hinder the students' progress.

84. A-level results in 2001 met national expectations overall, although there were fewer than average A-B grades. AS level results were below the school average. There has been improvement in both AS and A-level results since the courses started. Students do better in biology than in the other subjects they study. Provisional results for summer 2002 are in line with students' previous attainments.
85. On entry to the sixth form, students were broadly average in GCSE point score, although few had attained the higher GCSE grades. The standards seen in early Year 12 work indicate that students are below average in relation to A-level expectations, including their numeracy skills. Even the most able students find work on biochemistry very difficult and answers to examination questions are well below average. Over the term, progress is good as indicated in work on mitosis and DNA. Standards in Year 13 meet national A-level expectations in knowledge and understanding of the subject matter although there are some weaknesses in numerical and graphical work, such as the absence of lines of best fit on graphs. Overall, students begin the two-year course with below average study skills, then progress to just below in Year 12 and to meet expectations in Year 13. This means that achievement, in relation to prior attainment, is good.
86. Teaching is consistent and good overall, with some very good features. For example, Year 13 pupils acquired a good understanding of plant cell structure by a very well-planned, active-learning process. They researched textual information, derived from the Internet, processed it into annotated diagrams, rechecked it against the work of other groups and finally synthesised it by use of pictures taken with an electron

microscope. This was a very good example of the development of independent learning skills against a background of a general lack of these skills when students begin the course. The Year 12 group is well taught, judging by their work, although the lesson seen underlined the lack of investigative skills which students bring to the course. Practical work on enzymes was well organised, but the students' lack of laboratory skills hampered the preparation of the apparatus and slowed the proceedings. Hence learning in the practical area was at this stage only sound. Samples of students' work and their class files reinforce the judgement of consistently good teaching. Very well prepared teaching materials and careful marking support effectively the learning of less able students.

87. Standards in numeracy are below average, resulting in relative weakness in the analysis and evaluation strands of the coursework. For example, a number of graphs were unsophisticated with lines drawn but without clear points or lines connecting the points, regardless of possible anomalies. Weaknesses are evident in the use of literacy, such as discussion, independent research and extended writing. Over the course, pupils are supported well and make good progress in these areas. Work using computers is evident (such as word processing and a Power Point presentation) but needs further development for example in data logging and the use of spreadsheets. The students' attitudes to work are good and student behaviour is very good.
88. Leadership of the department is very good and the management of its work is good. The curriculum is implemented well at both AS and A-level. Target setting is thorough and students and parents receive half-termly reports on progress towards the targets. The particular strength in the management of biology is extra-curricular provision, which caters for above average students, raises expectations generally and supports career choices by students, particularly those interested in medical fields. About a dozen students attend regular enriching 'Science in Action' lectures at Guy's Hospital. There is mentoring by medical students and a summer school for students interested in medical careers at Nottingham University, paid for by the school. As a result, in 2001, four out of six students went on to medical or premedical courses (the others to pharmacology and psychology). This is very good outcome, given the prior attainment of the students. The number of students studying biology has increased every year since 1997 and now stands at a healthy 22 students. Written resources are good and reflect good teacher knowledge and understanding. Library provision is sound. The department feels that there is some lack of resources, but this was not evident in the lessons seen. The technicians make a good contribution both to the preparation of apparatus and to student learning, and help those lacking laboratory skills.

## Chemistry

Overall, the quality of provision in chemistry is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Teachers' subject knowledge is good.
- The best teaching is well planned and uses question and answer techniques well to probe students' understanding.

### Areas for improvement

- The monitoring of students' achievements and the identification of action to improve standards requires a greater focus.
- Students' independent learning skills are not as well developed as they could be.

89. In 2001 and 2002 students achieved satisfactory results in A-level examinations given their previous performance at GCSE and AS-level. In 2001, the performance of the small entry of six students was overall below that nationally, because although five students passed only one achieved a high grade. In 2002 all three students passed but at the lowest grade. However students are not doing significantly worse in chemistry than in their other subjects, although fewer students now achieve at the higher grades than in 1999 and 2000. Nine students took AS chemistry in summer 2002 and eight of the students gained a pass grade, mostly at the lower grades. All eight students who passed continued into the second year of the advanced course: a good take-up.
90. Overall standards are currently below those expected nationally. However for current Year 12 students, interim school-based assessments indicate satisfactory progress. In Year 13, some students show satisfactory progress whilst an able student is making poor progress. Progress is satisfactory overall. Assessed practical work for Year 13 students showed a number of assessment categories with low marks. Work from Year 12 students consisted of an appropriate range of past examination questions, which were competently completed and showed the sound teaching of calculation skills. Sound work on industrial chemistry was also seen but it showed only modest research and presentational skills. Students did not explain concepts in detail or develop and express clearly their ideas in writing so that their teachers could identify strengths and weaknesses in understanding. In lessons, Year 13 students demonstrated competent practical skills during titration experiments (measuring very accurate volumes of liquids in neutralisation experiments). However some of them showed an insecure grasp of dissociation (how acids behave in solution) and Year 12 students, during discussions about halogens (a group of chemicals related to chlorine), showed their understanding of chemical concepts to be lower than their GCSE grades would suggest they should be. The students' practical skills are underdeveloped.
91. Overall, teaching is satisfactory. Where teaching shows strengths, the lessons are well planned and materials appropriate and well distributed. In one lesson, good use was made of question and answer techniques to probe the understanding of dissociation constants and direct the lesson through logical argument. The preliminary stage of the lesson prepared students well for the subsequent practical and the pace of work was appropriate. Where teaching shows room for improvement, the teacher talks too much and does not make enough use of question and answer techniques to probe students' understanding, to encourage them to make observations and to help them think about the science behind the observations they make.
92. Students receive appropriate feed-back on their homework with corrections shown and written comments. A wider range of learning styles and set pieces of work would

enable teachers to assess more fully the students' understanding and to identify areas of weakness that need to be addressed. The attitudes of students to their work are good. Students apply themselves well to their task but seem reluctant to ask questions, to challenge the teacher's statements or to seek clarification when they are unsure. They do not take a sufficiently independent, thoughtful and inquisitive, approach to their work. This would help to raise standards.

93. Management of the chemistry aspect of science is satisfactory. However there is no specialist chemist with a specific responsibility for the chemistry course. Inspection evidence shows that the monitoring of students' achievements and the identification of action to improve standards requires a greater focus. The use of information and communication technology to support students' learning is improving but still requires further development. Opportunities for students' to attend 'Science in Action' lectures outside school help to broaden the students' knowledge and understanding of scientific practice. Resources are adequate but the work of the department would benefit from more support materials.

## **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING**

94. The school offers design and technology courses at A and AS level. There were no A-level students in summer 2001, although in 2000 one out of two girls entered gained a pass grade. In 2002 three girls achieved an AS pass in product design.

## **BUSINESS**

### **Business Studies**

Overall, the quality of provision in business is **good**.

#### **Strengths**

- All students make good progress, with the majority showing good achievement in relation to their previous attainment.
- Planning to meet new course requirements is thorough.
- Help and support provided to students are very effective in improving their learning.
- Teaching is very good and this contributes significantly to the progress made by all students.
- The range of courses offered within the department is good.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Standards of achievement and attainment for some students could be higher.
- Teaching would benefit further across the department from more opportunities for teachers to observe each other and to share the best ideas and teaching strategies.

95. The results of students taking advanced-level courses, either as AVCE or GCE A-levels, have improved over the last three years. In 2002 all students passed the new single AVCE examination in business studies and half achieved the highest grades. Results for students completing the GCE A-level course in 2001 and 2000 were in line with national averages, but few entrants attained the highest grades. All students who completed the AS level course for the first time in 2002 achieved a pass between grades C and E.
96. The number of students who have achieved at least a pass on the Intermediate GNVQ course in business has risen over the last three years. Many of the students who

achieve the lower grades begin their chosen course with relatively weak GCSE grades. When taking this into account, overall results indicate that students taking business courses make good progress and achieve well. This includes those with special educational needs and those for whom English is not their first language.

97. The GNVQ intermediate course is growing in popularity in the sixth form. The integration of work experience into this course makes a major contribution to the development of learning skills and the employability of students. At the end of this course, the majority of students begin a two year AVCE course leading to either one or two advanced levels in business.
98. Standards for current sixth form students are in line with those expected nationally overall. The students are making good progress given their prior achievements. Year 12 students on the advanced business course can identify different types of business cultures, although those starting the course with low GCSE grades find it difficult. All students show a competent use of computers, especially the use of spreadsheets to display and analyse data. Year 13 understand clearly the importance of spreadsheets within the business environment and confidently use them. For example, during the inspection, students who had recently started the finance module made very good progress in extending their understanding of the importance of “cash flow” in business by using their computer skills to produce spreadsheets to show patterns of income and expenditure over several months.
99. Teaching of business classes is very good. The four teachers who deliver the wide range of courses offered in Years 12 and 13 all have different teaching styles and areas of expertise. All courses are very well planned and great attention is paid to meeting the changing demands of the new course requirements and specifications. Students are very well prepared for both internally and externally assessed coursework. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, which they use to plan lessons that develop and extend students understanding of business concepts. The support offered to students, both in and out of lessons is very good. Staff are approachable and always ready to offer guidance. However, the department needs to ensure that all lessons are planned and delivered to ensure that students identified as capable of attaining the highest grades are given every opportunity to do so. To enable all staff to improve further on their lesson planning and to ensure the learning needs of all students are met the department should explore opportunities to enable teachers to observe each other as a way of sharing good practice.
100. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department plays a full and active role in the teaching and has introduced detailed schemes of work for all courses in business. Her commitment to raising standards year on year is unquestionable. As a result, staff show a strong unity and a shared concern for continuing improvement and progress. This sense of common purpose is reinforced by effective communication and very strong systems for monitoring student progress. An annual review of the work of the department involves all department members. The results of that review identify the priorities for the department for the following year.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

101. Information and communication technology was not a specific subject focus for the inspection. The school runs a good range of information and communication technology courses and it is a popular subject at both GNVQ Intermediate and Advanced level. Most Year 12 students undertake the key skills option in information and communication technology. In summer 2001 nine out of the ten students entered for the GNVQ advanced course gained a pass with three girls gaining a merit and three a distinction. In the AVCE course in summer 2002 all eight entrants passed with results overall in line with those nationally. The key skills course is well planned. Teaching seen in the inspection was satisfactory with teachers showing good subject knowledge.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

102. The school currently runs one course in this area. This is a two year AS course in sport and physical education with currently one student in Year 13 and four in Year 12. In summer 2002 one out of the two girls entered passed. Unfortunately the Year 13 student was absent for the one lesson planned for observation by the inspection team.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

103. The school offers courses in health and social care both at GNVQ Intermediate level and at AVCE. Results in the Intermediate GNVQ course are good, with all students gaining a pass in summer 2002 and over half a merit or distinction. The Intermediate course provides good opportunities for students to gain sufficient qualifications to take an advanced course that will lead to Higher Education. In 2001 all students passed the GNVQ advanced course and in 2002 three out of the four entrants the AVCE course (replacing GNVQ advanced).

## **VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

104. The focus was on theatre studies but work in art and design was also sampled. Currently three students take the AS course in art and design in Year 12 and six the A2 course in Year 13. In summer 2001 all students achieved an A-level pass, but results in summer 2002 were less good with only half the students gaining a pass. Year 12 students achieved results in line with national averages in their AS examinations in 2002 and six are currently continuing to the full, two-year qualification. During the inspection one Year 13 art lesson was seen. Students' work shows good progress, and discussion with them indicated commitment and interest. However, they need to be encouraged to contribute more in lessons. The art department has recently moved to new accommodation which, whilst an improvement, is not ideal. The interactive white board facility is a positive addition. The school offers a two year AS course in music. Neither of the two students passed in summer 2002. There are currently two students in Year 12. Inspectors were unable to sample work in music during their time in the school because of the timetable arrangements.

## Theatre Studies

Overall, the quality of provision in theatre studies is **good**.

### Strengths

- The leadership and management of the subject are good.
- Teaching and learning are good and help the students to make good progress.
- A-level and AS examination results are improving.
- Very positive student attitudes and very good relationships between the students themselves and with their teachers lead to successful practical work.
- The opportunities for students to work collaboratively and to explore moral and social issues make a very good contribution to the students' personal development.

### Areas for improvement

- Examination results would improve with better written work from students.

105. Examination results in 2001 for candidates in AS and A-level theatre studies were below the levels expected for these courses, but provisional results for 2002 indicate an improvement. Students now achieve results at least in line with what their prior attainment would suggest is likely. Current students are making good progress. Year 12 students are working at expected levels and Year 13 students do some work that is better than might be expected. This applies particularly to practical work. Not all students who take this course have obtained high GCSE grades and many find the written part of the course more demanding. Some students do not have English as their first language, and written work poses a particular challenge to them. Nevertheless the progress made by all students, whatever their background or ability, is good. They achieve well given their prior attainment.
106. Students have very positive attitudes to the subject. They relate extremely well to one another and throw themselves into group work enthusiastically. During the inspection a Year 12 group applied a variety of theatrical techniques to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in a lively way. They planned, performed and evaluated their work with a real sense of enjoyment. The same group was equally committed to activities using simple stage properties and the exploration of 'tempo rhythms' using percussion instruments. The students enhance their own learning by their commitment to the tasks and their trust of the teachers.
107. Teaching is good. Teachers are adept at setting up interesting tasks to help students explore the various aspects of the syllabuses. They use a wide range of resources such as props, costumes, musical instruments, lighting effects, a camcorder and a digital camera, as well as texts and notebooks. Lessons have pace and provide students with real challenge. The two teachers both know their subject well and are able to help their students with any aspect of the courses. They are aware of those for whom writing is a problem and provide appropriate support. They relate well to the students and create a sense of purpose in lessons. As a result the students take responsibility for much of their own learning. In a Year 13 lesson on the play *Our Country's Good*, students delivered imaginary monologues in the role of particular characters and evaluated their own and other students' performances. They had clearly acquired a good knowledge of the text and of the theory of the theatrical practitioners they were studying, and could apply this to their acting. Teachers are often able to stand back and let the students learn by trying out the different approaches

that have been suggested. At the same time, they are concerned that their students reflect on their work and keep notes that sum up what they discover.

108. Work in theatre studies makes a very good contribution to the personal development of the students through good opportunities for them to work together. Moral and social issues are raised by the texts they study and cover topics such as gender, relationships, crime and punishment, suffering and tragedy. The sixth formers also join in the extra-curricular work of the department, including the drama club and school productions. They attend a good number of live stage performances and workshops.
109. The subject benefits from having two well-equipped drama studios, although there is some noise interference between the two rooms. Another area in the school can be adapted for productions. One of the teachers is recently qualified, and was inducted into the work here by the head of department. They now work together well as a strong team and share the sixth form teaching. Assessment procedures are good and there are clear targets for students. This is a department that is well led and managed and that has real capacity for further improvement.

## HUMANITIES

110. The focus of the inspection was on sociology and history, although students' work and lessons were sampled in government and politics, and psychology. Provision for government and politics is good. Teaching in the lesson seen was very good. Numbers taking AS and A-level examinations have been small so the comparison of results with national averages is not appropriate. However in 2001 and 2002 all students passed at both AS and A-level. Psychology has recently been introduced. Discussion with Year 12 students indicates that they have made a good start to the course and show a good understanding of the work they have so far completed on short and long term memory. In geography, the pass rate has been 100 percent in the last two years. Theology is to be inspected by the diocesan team and it has a separate report. In summer 2002 all twelve girls who sat the AS examination passed. A quarter gained the highest A-B grades.

## History

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

### Strengths

- Teaching is good: it is enthusiastic, planned well and reflects high expectations of students.
- Students have positive attitudes to the subject.
- Leadership and management of the subject is strong and ensures that students are offered a coherent route through a difficult subject.

### Areas for improvement

- The department should continue to try to encourage more students to opt for history in the sixth form.

111. All students who sat the AS and A-level examinations in 2001 passed although numbers are too small to allow meaningful comparisons with national averages. However, all achieved either in line with or better than predictions. Although numbers were still small in 2002, results indicate that standards are improving. Almost every girl

achieved better than predicted at A-level and all five Year 12 students who sat the AS examination achieved A grades. A very good performance.

112. Inspection evidence confirms that achievement is good and that current students' standards are in line with course expectations. Students analyse sources carefully and evaluate a wide range of evidence to produce well-balanced and convincing conclusions. This was evident in a Year 12 lesson where students analysed effectively the reasons for the rise of Italian fascism. Students of all abilities articulate their own views with growing confidence. This was clearly seen in two Year 13 lessons on black civil rights in America. In the first lesson, students were diffident and found it difficult initially to explain Roosevelt's achievements in this context, whereas by the next lesson they explained their arguments much more confidently. This is because the teacher worked hard to motivate and encourage students and gave clear helpful advice. Students' written work is carefully organised and comprehensive. Students learn effectively in their courses in sixth form history and they show good progress in both thinking and writing. This good learning results from both the experienced teaching in the department and from the positive attitudes students have towards their work.
  
113. Teaching is good overall and students learn well as a result. They also share in the enthusiasm of their teachers. Teachers present information quickly and clearly and work hard to ensure that students of all abilities are able to reach their full potential. Students with special educational needs, or those who are recent arrivals to this country, are given effective support and clear guidance. Lessons are lively, well structured and based on confident subject expertise. Students develop as independent historians because the teaching encourages them to do so. Year 13 students, for example, gave presentations using an interactive whiteboard during the week of the inspection. Despite initial teething problems with the technology, the two students showed a clear understanding of the role of Goebbels in Hitler's Germany and presented their findings with confidence and skill. Particular strengths of the teaching are the clear structure and guidance given to students within a framework of independent learning. Folders are checked every half term, revision is built into the syllabus and examination mark schemes are used as an integral part of lessons. As a result of this good teaching, students show enthusiasm for their learning and feel well supported by all their teachers. They are supportive of one another and classroom relationships are positive.
  
114. The subject benefits from strong leadership, effective management, and a clear sense of direction. Although the head of department was on extended sick leave during the time of the inspection, teaching remains good and the department continues to function well. A particular strength of the department is the extremely thorough handbook, which contains a great deal of useful guidance on teaching and learning. A good range of resources and visits, including, for example, a proposed trip to the new Mussolini exhibition, enhances the curriculum. Efforts have also been made to ensure that the curriculum is relevant to the needs and interests of the students. The cramped accommodation makes it difficult to use effectively the full range of teaching strategies.

## Sociology

The overall quality of provision in sociology is **very good**.

### Strengths

- Standards are improving.
- Teaching is very good and uses a range of effective methods that result in very good learning.
- Students are enthusiastic and sociology is a popular subject in the school.
- A very good extra-curricular programme enhances the curriculum.

### Areas for improvement

- Accommodation is rather cramped.

115. The most recent A-level results in sociology, for which national comparisons are available, give overall performance in summer 2001 in line with that nationally. However, the percentage of students achieving grades A-B was a little below average. AS results show similar standards. The latest results suggest standards are rising. A higher proportion of students obtained grades A-B in 2002 and AS results also improved. Observation of lessons and a scrutiny of students' work show that standards are currently just above average and achievement is very good.
116. Year 12 students, none of whom have previously studied sociology, have made a good start to their course. They are beginning to develop an understanding of different theoretical traditions and can define and illustrate key concepts. Their achievement is good and they have already made clear gains in their knowledge and understanding. Year 13 students build very well on what they learn in Year 12. They have a good understanding of the theoretical foundations of the subject. They work hard to apply theoretical concepts to a range of familiar and unfamiliar situations. Student files are well organised and provide a valuable learning resource. Students with special educational needs and those who are academically less able make very good progress over the two years of their course.
117. The teaching of sociology is very good. Teachers' understanding of their subject enables them to give very clear explanations of concepts, theories and principles. In a Year 13 lesson on the Protestant work ethic and the spirit of capitalism, although the content was very difficult, students were able to develop a basic understanding of this theory because the teacher explained it so well. Teachers are adept at using anecdotal or relevant contemporary evidence and this enlivens lessons and keeps students interested. This was evident in a Year 12 lesson where a character, Little Mo, from the TV soap 'EastEnders', was used to illustrate the issue of domestic violence. Lessons challenge and probe students' understanding and are planned well. The quality of the teaching is enhanced by a very good programme of educational visits such as a recent conference on young offenders and a debate on bullying held by the Royal College of Psychiatrists. Teachers are enthusiastic and are a good role model for the subject. Because of this very good teaching, students learn very well and show good levels of concentration, perseverance and independence. They show insight in lesson discussions and most express their ideas with growing confidence. This was evident in a lesson where students argued with their teacher about the lyrics of 'garage music' and whether they were harmful to society.

118. The subject benefits from very good leadership, effective management, and a clear sense of direction shared by both the head of department and by his very committed colleague. The strong planning is evident in the good schemes of work. These are thorough and effective and enhanced by a strong extra-curricular programme. Another strong feature of the department is its inclusive nature: students of all abilities are welcomed and helped to achieve their full potential. Accommodation for the subject is cramped for the subject's increasing numbers.

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

### English

Overall, the quality of provision in English literature is **good**.

#### Strengths

- Leadership and management of the work of the department are good; teachers' work is well monitored and ideas are shared regularly.
- Teaching is good and careful lesson planning and assessment contribute significantly to the good progress students make.
- The students' positive attitudes and good relationships enable them to work well together.
- Through the study of texts that cover contemporary issues, the subject makes a good contribution to students' personal development.

#### Areas for improvement

- The department should continue to review its practice in order to improve examination results further.

119. Examination results for A-level English literature in 2001 were below the expected levels for this course. Provisional results for 2002 show improvement, with all students gaining at least a grade E, although relatively few gained higher than grade D. For these particular candidates, however, this represents good achievement when put alongside prior attainment in examinations. In AS examinations, there was a similar pattern in 2001, but more candidates gained higher grades in 2002. Overall standards are improving.
120. The standard of work seen in lessons during the inspection was broadly in line with the levels expected for the course. Given the prior attainment of the students, good progress is made. Sixth form students know their set texts well and use this knowledge successfully to find evidence to answer specific questions. They make notes without support from their teachers and present their work clearly and confidently in class. For example in a Year 12 lesson on *The Handmaid's Tale*, students gave very competent presentations following work done in the lesson. Students with different backgrounds and needs all make good progress.
121. The positive attitudes shown by the students contribute significantly to their good progress. They relate well to their teachers and to each other, and make good use of opportunities to work in pairs and groups. They respond quickly to new tasks and are learning to work independently. They readily contribute ideas in lessons.
122. Good teaching also contributes to the students' achievement. Teachers know their subject well, plan well, and manage their lessons successfully. They produce good materials to support their students' learning: the worksheets used in lessons enable students of varying ability to write or make notes more effectively. The best lessons

are challenging and fast moving. Each member of the class is encouraged to participate. In a lesson on Shakespeare's *Henry V*, where the teacher had lost her voice, there was no diminution in the learning because the students were able to provide a detailed commentary on the scenes they were studying. They had done the research and the teacher had provided useful prompts for them to work from. Teachers set appropriate written work and mark it carefully, with much attention to detail. Their assessment of students' work is thus very thorough. More importantly, they give students an accurate picture of what they must do to improve further and to reach the targets they are set.

123. The subject makes a good contribution to the personal development of the students. The texts studied deal with a range of perspectives on war, race and gender, and students are encouraged to relate the issues to real life and not just regard them as an academic study. Recent conflicts in Nigeria over religion and gender have been connected to work that Year 12 students are doing on *The Handmaid's Tale*, and the students had obtained press cuttings to illustrate the relevance of the issue. In a lesson on *Wide Sargasso Sea* the teacher discussed issues of race and sexuality with her class in a meaningful way.
124. The subject is well led and managed, and has benefited from the department's self review process. The head of department monitors her colleagues' work and good ideas and practices are shared amongst the strong team of teachers.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

125. The school offers French, German and Spanish to GCSE, although relatively few pupils take two subjects at this level. All three languages have in the past been offered in the sixth form, with varying take-up. Currently there are classes in Year 12 and 13 in French and Spanish. No student dropped out between Year 12 and Year 13 this year. There was no French group in 2002. Apart from the A2 course in Year 13, a group is taking French AS level over two years. One girl passed A-level German in 2002. Currently no girls are taking German at A level. A very small number of girls take AS and A level in their first language, mainly Portuguese. All pass and achieve results appropriate for their abilities.
126. French was the main focus of the inspection, but work in Spanish was also sampled. Currently nine students take Spanish in Year 12 and two in Year 13. The teaching seen was satisfactory. Standards in Spanish are appropriate for students' abilities. A-level and AS results for 2001 and 2002 were good, although student numbers were small.

### French

Overall, the quality of provision in French is **satisfactory** with great potential for improvement

#### Strengths

- The teachers are dedicated and competent.
- Students show a willingness to learn.

#### Areas for improvement

- Strategies to overcome the steep gradient of difficulty between GCSE and sixth form work are not yet successful in improving results.
- Recruitment of students to individual modern language courses is low.

127. Numbers of candidates entered for A-level examinations over the past four years have been low, the highest number in any one year being six and in one year no candidates. Comparison with national figures is thus very difficult. Attainment (allowances being made for native speaker students) is just below that expected for the course overall; results at A-level (including AS and A2 levels) being generally towards the lower end of the A-E scale. Standards seen in lessons and in work scrutinised confirm this view. Most students have an A or B grade at GCSE, which reflects good teaching in Years 10 and 11. This enables students of average linguistic ability to obtain a higher grade pass at GCSE. The steep rise in difficulty when they start work at AS and A2 levels then shows up weaknesses which are not apparent at GCSE. The writing of accurate French, though it improves with time, represents a real challenge for most students, whose knowledge of basic grammar is deficient at the beginning of the course. The students are also diffident in speech and are rarely willing to make a spontaneous utterance in the foreign language. Those for whom French is a home language are, understandably, unwilling to appear to be too talkative in front of their peers. Nevertheless, standards reached are satisfactory for the abilities of the students and achievement is thus at least satisfactory. The same comments apply to the work in Spanish that was sampled.
128. Teaching is good overall. Teachers are thoroughly competent in the language(s) they teach, being native speakers for the most part. Their knowledge of the material they cover is very good, and their preparation for the lessons observed was excellent. The aims of lessons are always clear. Work is largely based round a textbook course, with much additional material introduced as required. Use is made of audio-visual aids and students use the Internet to further their studies. The lack of background knowledge of many students makes life harder for teachers. Thus, a potentially good lesson became 'bogged down' when students had little knowledge of the event under discussion, and the technical language used in a newspaper cutting was too specialist to be easily accessible, even to the native speaker student present. Nevertheless, teachers remain patient and persistent and these qualities ensure that appropriate learning takes place. Lessons dealing with tobacco addiction and with the French parliamentary system were well matched to students' needs.
129. Work seen was always thoroughly and constructively marked, and homework is well used. Students show a universally positive attitude towards their studies, the subject, and their teachers. They arrive punctually, equipped and ready for work. In class they show muted enthusiasm, and tend to rely upon the teacher to see them through the lesson. In recent years, three students have progressed to study languages at university.
130. The small numbers in class place demands on teachers and students alike to maintain the flow of conversation when there are too few participants to contribute. An increase in numbers of well-qualified students would be of great advantage to all modern foreign language subjects. The range and quality of the courses offered are good. The course in A-level French offers many opportunities for the study of contemporary issues. The lessons seen on tobacco addiction, on homelessness and the session on the problems of a recent oil-spill, linked the language content of the course to a live issue. Evidence indicates that the school takes great care of its students. Detailed records of attainment are carefully studied and used for prediction of grades, assistance to students and for improvements to courses. The department, which is led by a member of the senior management team, is very competently run and has a good collegiate feel about it. Documentation, including schemes of work and brochures for students, is very good, and all staff are fully aware of the needs and challenges of sixth form teaching.