

INSPECTION REPORT

KING EDWARD VI CAMP HILL SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

BIRMINGHAM

LEA area: Birmingham

Unique reference number: 103553

Headteacher: Mrs Joan Fisher

Lead inspector: Robin Coulthard

Dates of inspection: 22nd – 26th September 2003

Inspection number: 259276

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

© Crown copyright 2003

This report may be reproduced in whole or in part for non-commercial educational purposes, provided that all extracts quoted are reproduced verbatim without adaptation and on condition that the source and date thereof are stated.

Further copies of this report are obtainable from the school. Under the School Inspections Act 1996, the school must provide a copy of this report and/or its summary free of charge to certain categories of people. A charge not exceeding the full cost of reproduction may be made for any other copies supplied.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar
School category:	Voluntary aided
Age range of pupils:	11 - 18
Gender of pupils:	Female
Number on roll:	854
School address:	Vicarage Road Kings Heath Birmingham
Postcode:	B14 7QJ
Telephone number:	0121 444 2150
Fax number:	0121 444 5123
Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr C W Hughes
Date of previous inspection:	2 nd February 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

King Edward VI Camp Hill School for Girls is a highly selective grammar school of average size. The school is consistently one of the highest attaining nationally at GCSE and A-Level. Its pupils are drawn from about 75 feeder schools over a wide area of Birmingham. With eight applicants for each available place, the school is heavily oversubscribed. Pupils enter the school with very high levels of literacy and numeracy. Just over half of the pupils are from ethnic backgrounds that are other than white British. No pupils are at an early stage of learning English. Pupils' social and economic backgrounds are above average. Almost no girls have special educational needs. Very few join or leave the school other than at the beginning or end of a school year.

The school is a Beacon school. It gained the Schools Achievement Award in 2000, 2001 and 2002. It holds the Schools Curriculum and the Sportsmark awards. As a school in an Excellence in Cities area it receives the Leadership Incentive Grant. The school participates very actively in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

Almost all girls continue into the sixth form where they are joined by a small number from outside, and subsequently take up university places. About one in ten pupils gain places at Oxford or Cambridge.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities	
			Main school	Sixth form
11746	Robin Coulthard	Lead inspector		
9053	Vivienne Phillips	Lay inspector		
22544	David Wood	Team inspector	English, drama	English literature
32320	Jane Gaffney	Team inspector	Mathematics	Mathematics
29742	Patricia Fyans	Team inspector	Science	Physics Chemistry
20767	Jerry Royle	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
32367	Jo Pike	Team inspector	Art and Citizenship	
15397	Chris Whitehead	Team inspector	Design and technology	
22042	John Challands	Team inspector	Geography	Geography
10817	George Rayner	Team inspector	History	History
32208	Derek Aitken	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	German
7854	Richard Crozier	Team inspector	Music	
30800	Betty Colley	Team inspector	Physical education Special educational needs	
30128	Shirley Stanley	Team inspector	Religious education	Music
27492	John Barker	Team inspector		Business education
23880	Olivia Hall	Team inspector		Art
3242	Mike Newman	Team inspector		Psychology

The inspection contractor was:

e-Qualitas Ltd

Langshaw
Pastens Road
Limpsfield Chart
Oxted
Surrey
RH8 0RE

Any concerns or complaints about the inspection or the report should be made initially to the contractor. The procedures are set out in the leaflet '*Complaining about Ofsted Inspections*', which is available from Ofsted Publications Centre (telephone 07002 637833) or Ofsted's website (www.ofsted.gov.uk).

REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT	6
PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS	
STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS	10
Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses	
Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities	
QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL	14
Teaching and learning	
The curriculum	
Care, guidance and support	
Partnership with parents, other schools and the community	
LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT	22
PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES	25
SUBJECTS IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4	
SUBJECTS IN THE SIXTH FORM	
PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS	55

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

The school provides an **excellent** all-round education and gives **excellent value for money**. Improvement since the last inspection has been very good.

The school's main strengths

- Results are amongst the highest in the country at GCSE and A-Level.
- Standards of work are very high; pupils' achievement is very good in the main school and excellent in the sixth form.
- The conspicuously harmonious relationships amongst girls from a wide range of racial backgrounds and their excellent attitudes result in an outstanding ethos.
- Teaching is very good in the main school and excellent in the sixth form.
- The school looks after its pupils very well and provides very good guidance.
- The leadership of the headteacher and other key staff is excellent.
- The school has no significant areas of weakness.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

Year 11 and 13 results

Performance compared with:		all schools			similar schools
		2000	2001	2002	2002
Year 11	GCSE/GNVQ examinations	A*	A*	A*	B
Year 13	A/AS level and VCE examinations	n/a	A*	unavailable	

Key: A* - in the top 5 per cent; A - well above average; B - above average; C - average; D - below average; E - well below average

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

Pupils' achievement is **very good** in the main school. In Years 7 to 9, it is excellent in English and science. Standards are very high in English, mathematics, geography, history and modern foreign languages. Standards are well above average in other subjects, except design and technology and physical education, where they are above average. Achievement is excellent in Years 10 and 11 in English, mathematics, design and technology, drama and music, and very good in the remaining subjects. Standards are very high in English, mathematics, design and technology, modern foreign languages, geography, history and music. Elsewhere, they are well above average. Standards of English across the curriculum are very high, as is pupils' competence in mathematics. Achievement in the sixth form is excellent.

Girls' personal qualities are **excellent**. Their attitudes and behaviour are outstanding. Their lively interaction helps their learning and is the principal factor in the school's vibrant character. Attendance is very high, with very little unauthorised absence. Opportunities for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development are very good. The school's expectation of pupils' conduct and the girls' willingness to work hard and collaborate, ensure first rate moral and social development. Cultural development is exceptional because of the way girls from contrasting ethnic backgrounds get on together. Spiritual development is allowed for widely across the curriculum, but not all assemblies strongly promote reflection.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided is **excellent**. Teaching and learning are **very good** in Years 7 to 11 and **excellent** in the sixth form. Relationships are excellent. Teachers harness the girls' eagerness to learn, and stimulate their interest with lively questioning and very good use of time. Lessons are very well planned and challenging. Very good assessment helps teachers to plan and pupils to improve. Individual help enables all pupils to make very good progress. The range of teaching methods and resources enhances learning. Girls learn maturely, concentrating studiously for extended periods. The skills needed for effective study are widely practised, and girls receive a satisfactory, if inconsistent experience of ICT.

The curriculum is very good and provides very well for the girls' academic ambitions. A wide range of AS and A-Level courses cater for the sixth form students. The needs of gifted and talented pupils are well met. A wide range of extra-curricular activities enrich most areas of the curriculum. Sport and music flourish, and participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme is very successful. High standards of care and guidance are provided. The partnership with parents is good and very effective when problems arise. Very good provision is made for the very few pupils who have special educational needs. No pupils are at an early stage of learning English. The school maintains very effective links with partner schools in the King Edward VI Foundation, and as a Beacon school provides very good support for other schools.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher and other key staff are clearly focused on attaining high academic standards. This vision is shared by all with responsibility. Management of subjects and the systems for ensuring the girls' welfare are very good. The school reviews its work systematically and whole-school priorities are reflected within subjects. The school has carefully minimised the impact of recent temporary staffing problems. Governors are extremely effective. They have a very thorough knowledge of the working of the school, they rigorously analyse results, and play a full part in monitoring developments and strategic planning.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents' views are positive. Their daughters like school, behaviour is good and they are making good progress. Teaching is good and staff expect the girls to work hard. The girls are well treated by staff and helped to become mature. Some parents do not feel well enough informed about their progress and think the school does not seek parents' views enough. The girls think the school is good, they are well taught and their work is helpfully assessed. Homework is worthwhile and set regularly. They feel trusted, but that the school is insufficiently interested in their views. Inspectors agreed with all the positive views expressed by parents and pupils. They consider, however, that adequate opportunities exist for parents to have their say, but that few parents take the opportunities offered. Inspectors felt that not all decisions are sufficiently explained to the girls, for example the recent loss of playground space.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

- There are no important points for improvement.
- All statutory requirements are met.

THE SIXTH FORM AT KING EDWARD VI CAMP HILL SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

The sixth form is larger than usual with 247 girls each taking up to 5 A/AS level courses, including general studies. Its ethnic mix is highly prized. Attainment on entry is very high.

OVERALL EVALUATION

The overall effectiveness of the sixth form is excellent and it provides **excellent value for money**. This is because the girls achieve exceptionally high standards as a result of their impressive commitment to learning and the excellent teaching they receive.

The main strengths

- Standards are very high, with results among the highest in the country.
- Girls strive exceptionally hard to achieve first rate success with their studies.
- Excellent learning results from highly effective teaching and expert knowledge of the curriculum.
- Parents and girls value the ethos of academic excellence within a harmonious community.
- Leadership is firm and focused on sustaining the tradition of outstanding achievement.
- There are no significant weaknesses.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses inspected in the sixth form are shown below. They are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected in full. Lessons were sampled in French, Latin, biology, ICT, religious education, graphics and theatre studies. Provision was excellent in theatre studies and very good in the others.

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Excellent in English , where girls work tirelessly to do their best in response to expert teaching. Very good in German , because expectations are high, students are well motivated and teaching is lively.
Mathematics	Excellent , with outstanding features such as expert subject knowledge in the teaching and an exceptional work ethic in learning that lead to very high results.
Science	Excellent in physics and very good in chemistry . Girls thrive on the intellectual challenge offered by highly effective teaching of difficult ideas, particularly on the very theoretical physics course.
Information and communication technology	There was no focus subject in this area.
Humanities	Very good in geography, history and psychology because girls' excellent attitudes combined with very good teaching result in very high standards.
Engineering, technology and manufacturing	There was no focus subject in this area.
Visual and performing arts and media	Excellent in art and music because of excellent teaching, girls' exemplary attitudes to work and their ambition to succeed.
Hospitality, sports, leisure and travel	No courses are taught in this area.
Business	Very good in business education , with consistently high achievement resulting from challenging teaching and girls' excellent commitment to succeed in the subject.
Health and social care	No courses are taught in this area.
General education	No courses are taught in this area.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Checks on academic performance are very rigorous. This leads to very good support and guidance based on sharply focused feedback on the improvements girls need to make. Guidance on how to make choices about sixth form and university courses is inconsistent, largely because external advisers offer advice which is too generalised. Sometimes subject teachers are able to fill the gaps and offer high quality advice to girls. Support for girls with personal difficulties is much improved after an unsettled period of leadership due to a changeover of personnel. Year 12 girls appreciate the excellent induction that contributed to trusting relationships with staff.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent, with similar qualities to those found in the main school. The school has organised recent changes in personnel very well, ensuring that new key staff have been very strongly supported. The sixth form is strongly focused on high attainment in an ethos that is very supportive of individual students. Subject leadership is very good.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Girls have a very positive view of the sixth form. They are very pleased with the strong sense of community and inter-racial harmony that are fundamental to their experience of sixth form life. They value the level of intellectual challenge and interaction with teachers who foster critical thinking skills, independence and determination to succeed, while offering them purposeful support. They are more critical of the consistency of helpful advice on choosing sixth form courses and planning for future studies. Almost all students feel that the courses they are studying in the sixth form suit their abilities and plans, although the guidance they receive is of inconsistent quality. A large minority of students have difficulty identifying 'an adult to turn to who knows them well as an individual'. Discussions with girls in Years 12 and 13 indicated that this is partly linked to staff changes, and this situation has now largely been resolved. About a third of girls in Year 13 do not feel that the school seeks and responds to their views in a meaningful way. Girls in Year 12 echoed this feeling, although both groups were clear that well thought out initiatives and good ideas such as the Macmillan Appeal fund-raising coffee morning, were well received.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Results in national examinations are very high. Standards are very high throughout the school. Achievement at an early stage in the school year is very good in Years 7 to 11.

Main strengths

- Results in national testing at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were very high.
- Standards early in Years 9 and 11 are very high and pupils achieve very well.
- GCSE results in 2002 were in the top five per cent nationally and in the top five per cent for schools who had similar prior attainment at the end of Year 9.

Commentary

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	43 (45)	33 (33)
mathematics	49 (49)	35 (34)
science	43 (45)	33 (33)

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

1. Results in national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2003 were very high, a level they have maintained consistently in recent years. Results for English, mathematics and science were in the top five per cent nationally for pupils attaining Level five or above. For pupils achieving Level 6 or above, results were in the top five per cent nationally in English and mathematics, and well above average in science. Pupils' average points score in the core subjects was in the top five per cent for all schools. In comparison with other grammar schools, results in English and mathematics were well above average, and average in science. The average points score was well above average for grammar schools. The school significantly surpassed the Local Education Authority's target of 100 per cent passes at Level 5 or above in the core subjects.

2. Pupils achieve very well in relation to their abilities and starting points. In lessons observed, achievement was excellent in English and science, and very good in all other subjects. Standards in work seen were very high in art, French, German, geography and history. Standards were well above average in English, mathematics, science, music and religious education. In design technology and physical education, standards were above average. In citizenship, standards are in line with expectation. In all lessons, the ablest pupils are very well challenged. In some lessons, however, comparatively lower-attaining pupils did not receive as much individual support as they needed.

Key Stage 4

Standards in GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2002

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	99 (100)	50 (48)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	99 (100)	91 (91)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	57 (n/a)	n/a (n/a)

There were 120 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. National comparators are not yet available for GCSE results in 2003. In 2002, the school's results were in the top five per cent nationally for pupils gaining 5 or more A* to C, 5 or more A* to G and 1 or more A* to G passes. At 5 or more A* to C grades, results were above average for schools whose pupils had similar prior attainment at the end of Year 9, and average in comparison with grammar schools in similar socio-economic contexts. Since the last inspection, the school's average total GCSE points score per pupil has risen at a faster rate than nationally. The school exceeded its target average points score, gaining 78 when the target was 71. In comparison with the 2002 result, the 2003 target is pitched low because targets are set before the previous year's results are known. Results in all subjects were significantly above the national average in all subjects, except physics. Less than two per cent of results were below grade C. In comparison with their other subjects and the national picture, girls did best in French, German, design technology and mathematics, and less well in drama, art and design and physics. Results are well above average in the short course ICT, which all pupils take in Year 9, and very high in design and technology, which they take in Year 10.

4. Standards of work seen in Year 11 were very high overall, almost without exception, well above average. This is an appropriate reflection of the very good teaching they receive. The girls achieve very well in relation to what might be expected of them. Their achievement is excellent in mathematics, English and design and technology, music and drama. In all other subjects, they are achieving very well. Standards in citizenship are in line with national expectation and pupils' achievement is satisfactory.

Sixth form

Main strength

- A-Level results were in the top five per cent nationally in 2001, the last year for which the school has national comparisons.

Standards in GCE A Level examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2001

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	97.7 (97.1)	n/a
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	65.1 (58.1)	n/a
Average point score per pupil	30.6 (29.0)	n/a

There were 98 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year

5. National comparators are not yet available for 2002 for this school. Results have been sustained at a very high level since the time of the last inspection, in comparison with all maintained schools and with all providers of post-16 education. In 2001, results were high or very high in all subjects, except for religious education, where they were below average. In response to excellent teaching and carefully-targeted individual assessment, students' achievement is excellent.

6. In 2002, following the introduction of Curriculum 2000, the proportion of A and B grades rose significantly, to 73.6 per cent

7. In work seen during the inspection, standards were well above average and often very high across the curriculum. Standards were excellent in English, mathematics, geography and music, and well above average in the remaining subjects inspected. Study skills are very well developed. Students' engage in a very high level of debate and discussion with teachers. They have a clear idea of examination requirements and are often attaining standards in excess of these requirements.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Attendance is **excellent**. Pupils' attitudes are **outstandingly positive** and a most conspicuous strength of the school. Behaviour is **excellent**, and the school makes **very good** provision for ensuring that pupils develop and mature academically and socially.

Main strengths

- Attendance levels are very high and unauthorised absence is low.
- The social cohesion of the pupils is an outstanding feature that enhances their personal and academic development.
- The ethos of the school is permeated with vitality, good humour and a very strong sense of academic purpose.
- Provision for girls' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.

Commentary

8. Pupils are very keen to attend school and make every effort to avoid unnecessary absences. High standards of punctuality are maintained throughout the school day.

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year 2001/2002 (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data:	96.7	School data :	0.2
National data:	91.0	National data:	1.2

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

9. Behaviour is excellent in lessons and around the school. Girls negotiate various bottlenecks caused by narrow corridors around the premises with mature consideration for others. Their conduct is responsible whether or not they are supervised. The excellent condition of their surroundings clearly indicates a high degree of respect for their learning environment. Congested dining arrangements are made light of. No pupil has been suspended temporarily or permanently in the recent past. A strong pastoral system promotes social expectations that preclude bullying or any other form of harassment. Pupils have a strongly developed sense of right and wrong.

10. The school promotes racial harmony very successfully by its cultivation of a sense of common academic purpose that unites and integrates pupils. Relationships amongst the pupils are outstandingly positive. Friendships bridge racial differences and pupils value each other for their personal qualities. The mutual enrichment of the lives of pupils through very positive attitudes is the most conspicuously impressive feature amongst many in the school, and one which the girls themselves commented on very positively. The girls enjoy learning and are eager to do well themselves and support their classmates in their endeavours. Good humour is rife throughout school life. As a result, levels of motivation are very high and pupils value each other. The degree to which the girls challenge themselves is evident from their willingness to volunteer in class and extra-curricularly. This is very well exemplified by the wholehearted participation of a large number of girls in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme.

11. Pupils develop confidence in their abilities through the high expectations teachers have of them and the support teachers bestow. Teachers themselves present good role models by their dedication and industry. Girls learn to discuss, debate and question ideas, which gives them poise and sensitivity to others. The racial mix within the school affords wide perspectives, for example in discussions of social issues that elicit views from different racial traditions and standpoints. Very good provision for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development makes an important contribution to their overall development.

Ethnic background of pupils**Exclusions in the last school year**

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of pupils on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	410	0	0
White – Irish	18	0	0
White – any other White background	25	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	12	0	0
Mixed – White and Black African	5	0	0
Mixed – White and Asian	16	0	0
Mixed – any other mixed background	16	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	137	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	96	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	25	0	0
Black or Black British – Caribbean	14	0	0
Black or Black British – African	10	0	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	2	0	0
Chinese	39	0	0
Any other ethnic group	13	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	8	0	0

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

Sixth form

Students are mature and studious. Their attitudes are excellent.

Main strengths

- Students are very effective independent learners and strongly focused on attaining highly.
- Their responsible attitudes help them derive maximum benefit from teachers' guidance.
- The social ethos of the sixth form is characterised by friendliness and enthusiasm.

Commentary

12. Students' attendance and punctuality are excellent. Girls enter the sixth form with firm academic aims and are prepared to work very hard. The learning skills of independent research, purposeful discussion and collaboration develop further. Students value the help of staff and derive maximum benefit from the high level of individual guidance they receive. In a climate of rigorous academic endeavour, they show initiative and responsibility in their work. Students enjoy their work and participate enthusiastically in lessons. The sense of common purpose contributes to the high level of sociability amongst the girls. They are wholehearted in their participation in extra-curricular activities and in supporting activities involving younger pupils.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The school **provides an excellent education**. Curriculum provision is very good and the school makes very good provision for the girls' care, guidance and support.

Teaching and learning

The quality of teaching is very good in Years 7 to 11 and excellent in the sixth form. Girls respond very positively to this, which, coupled with their enthusiasm and determination, means that learning is always highly effective.

Main strengths

- Teaching is very good overall and excellent in drama.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and high expectations of their pupils.
- Teaching methods are highly effective in harnessing the girls' interest.
- Pupils learn very well and are eager to attain highly.
- Assessment is very effective and makes a significant impact on the girls' achievement.

Commentary

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 105 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
17 (16%)	46 (44%)	33 (31%)	8 (8%)	1 (1%)	0	0

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

13. At the time of the last inspection, teaching was considered 'consistently good and sometimes exceptional'. It was judged to be a strength of the school. It has improved since then and is now very good in Years 7 to 11 and excellent in the sixth form. One lesson in every six observed was excellent. Teachers have successfully used the national Key Stage 3 Strategy to improve their lesson planning and teaching.

14. Teaching and learning in lessons observed was excellent in drama at all stages. It is also excellent in music in Years 10 and 11. Teaching was of a more consistently high standard in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 7 to 9. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and maintain a very clear focus on promoting high standards. They have a very clear idea of examination requirements, but are equally aware of the need to make learning interesting. Teachers effectively communicate their enthusiasm for their subject to their classes. Excellent working relationships are maintained between teachers and pupils. Teachers use praise effectively to acknowledge and encourage good work. Teachers prepare lessons very well. All lessons have clear and worthwhile objectives that are shared with the class at the outset. Lessons generally begin with interesting starter activities that recall and reinforce previous learning and establish a brisk pace. A very effective start in a music lesson in Year 7 involved the pupils in clapping and singing activities that improved their accuracy in rhythm and pitch and left them fired up to tackle the challenging tasks that followed. Teachers employ an interesting and appropriate range of methods in each subject. The use of questioning is excellent, with follow up questions to elicit deeper views. Lesson objectives are generally revisited at the end of the lesson to consolidate what has been achieved.

15. Teachers have suitably high expectations of their pupils. It is a fundamental principle of the school to provide appropriately for all pupils. In their planning, teachers reflect the abilities of the whole group, and, in particular, they are aware of the large proportion of very able girls and the need to challenge them appropriately. Very occasionally, the comparatively lower-attaining girls did not receive all the support they needed. The school is mindful of any pupil with special educational needs (SEN) and provides very well for them. The school is aware of the need to broaden the use of expressive language on entry to the school for some pupils whose mother tongue is not English.

16. The outstandingly positive attitudes of the girls mean that they are eager to learn and capable of taking a high degree of responsibility for their own learning. Girls in Year 11 organised their own warm-up independently of the teacher before a physical education lesson. Pupils' responsiveness to questions is outstanding. They listen well and are eager to contribute orally. They seriously consider points of view other than their own. This resulted in valuable ideas on personal safety being shared in a personal, social and health education (PHSE) lesson in Year 9. Pupils confidently ask their own questions to clarify their ideas and knowledge. The exchange of ideas between girls of varied racial backgrounds adds richness to relationships and learning. Behaviour was not an issue in any lesson observed. In the few lessons that were judged only 'satisfactory', teachers did not sufficiently exploit the girls' zest for learning.
17. Work is efficient whether it is whole-class, group work or individual. In a Year 11 history lesson, outstanding collaboration enabled groups within a class to devise presentations of a very high standard in a topic on World War I. They used the very good range of materials available searchingly and were able to explain and justify their work very eloquently. A Year 7 class worked individually in self-imposed silence as an aid to concentration in art when reproducing in pencil gradations of tone from a photograph.
18. Time is carefully allocated to tasks to establish and maintain a good work rate. In an outstanding drama lesson in Year 10, pupils' achievement was excellent when they enthusiastically responded to the teacher's fast-paced demands, which involved warm-up, question-and-answer, independent improvisation, performance and evaluation. Role-play is used effectively in other subjects than drama. For example, in a Year 10 chemistry lesson, girls represented various vested interests in presentations for and against the extension of a quarry. The project involved careful research and weighing of evidence.
19. The development of language across the curriculum is excellent. In a Year 9 English class, pupils were challenged to define concepts, such as 'social responsibility'. The teacher's careful management meant that all pupils sharpened their understanding of abstract ideas.
20. Study skills develop very well. Girls engage frequently in independent research. The use of homework to develop independent study is excellent. The use of mathematics across the curriculum is very good. Most girls have access to ICT at home and opportunities to use computers in their own time at school. The use of computers is planned in most subjects but the accessibility of machines prevents their full use in class. However, the use of ICT has improved since the last inspection.
21. Teaching assistants are not employed, but non-teaching staff, for example in science, increase the efficiency of pupils' learning by very efficient management of resources.
22. Assessment procedures are very effective. The very good policy acknowledges assessment as a means of checking standards, providing encouragement, setting targets for improvement and identifying where intervention might be needed. An informative leaflet sets out the expectations for pupils and teachers. Work is marked against suitable criteria, related to National Curriculum levels in Years 7 to 9 and GCSE requirements in Years 10 and 11. Teachers provide very good feedback in lessons to guide pupils' learning. This is particularly effective in drama, where self-evaluation is also used very constructively. Assessment is excellent too in drama, history and science, and in design and technology at GCSE level. Marking is thorough and regular, but occasionally does not provide enough support for lower-attaining girls, as was noted in English. The assessment system in religious education is very good, but newly-introduced. No method of assessment has yet been adopted in citizenship.

Sixth form

Teaching and learning are excellent overall and at least very good in all subjects inspected. The very high standard of assessment has a significant impact on the standards attained.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 40 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
11 (28%)	22 (55%)	6 (15%)	1 (2%)	0	0	0

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

Main strengths

- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use a very good range of teaching strategies to stimulate students' learning.
- Students' have excellent attitudes to their work and learning is exceptionally diligent.
- Assessment is excellent and teachers give valued additional time to assist individual students.

Commentary

23. All teachers have a very high level of scholarship in the subjects they teach and have a very thorough knowledge of what is required for examination success. Planning is excellent and all teaching has an advanced degree of intellectual rigour that provides a suitable challenge for the very highly-attaining students. Students develop advanced research skills and their excellent work ethic helps them to achieve high standards in individual and independent study. In many subjects, the work tackled is beyond what is normally expected in a sixth form. The teachers are often used in a consultant role. Occasionally, as in Years 7 to 11, students with relatively lower capability are not receiving enough structured help to achieve the best they can.

24. Girls acknowledge the excellent working relationships that they enjoy with staff, and appreciate the helpful way teachers give their time in and out of lessons to providing individual support and assistance. In the student questionnaire this was cited as a valued characteristic of the mathematics department in particular.

25. Teachers' excellent presentations to classes included impressive examples of the use of ICT, for example in physics. The overall excellent teaching methods include individual and group work as best suits each task. Questioning and discussion sharpen students' effectiveness as learners. For example, in a Year 13 psychology lesson, the teacher gradually extended students' understanding of the psychology of stress. In an atmosphere of openness and mutual trust, students candidly drew on their own experiences to deepen the perceptions of the whole group.

26. Assessment is exceptionally thorough, very carefully targeted to meet each student's needs and to reflect the requirements of examination courses. Excellent and perceptive individual assessment in art developed students' critical thinking skills, stimulated their research into painters' styles for their 'personal study', and informed them clearly how they were progressing in respect of course requirements.

The curriculum

Overall, the range of curricular opportunities is **very good**. Enrichment of the curriculum through extra-curricular activities is very good. Resources are good and accommodation is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A very good curriculum serves the school's philosophy of high attainment very well.
- Literacy and numeracy are very well provided for.
- Schemes of work are of high quality.
- Very good enrichment is provided particularly through sport, the arts and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme.
- Access to computers is limited in some subjects.
- The range of activities in design and technology is narrow at GCSE level.
- Accommodation is very good.

27. The curriculum is well planned in all subjects to provide progression through programmes of study during Years 7 to 9 and GCSE requirements in Years 10 and 11. The quality and range of learning opportunities across the school are very good and provide a suitably challenging course of study for the school's highly able pupils. An appropriate statutory curriculum is in place, including for religious education, where the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus are fully met. The school's slightly shorter working week than that recommended nationally has no adverse effect on pupils' attainment.

28. In Years 7 to 9 all the subjects of the National Curriculum are followed. In Year 7, girls study French or German. From Year 8, they study both of these languages. Additionally, all girls study Latin in Year 8, and this is available as an examination course from Year 10. The school is not able to offer tuition in other languages to reflect the range of pupils' mother tongue languages. However, the school helps pupils who wish it to secure places on accredited courses provided locally, for example in Urdu. The new subject, citizenship, has been carefully prepared for, but pupils are not made sufficiently aware of examples of citizenship that occur across the curriculum.

29. A wide-ranging and appropriate course is provided in PHSE. Lessons sometimes have the benefit of outside speakers. A good new course has just been introduced, which fulfils statutory requirements and incorporates suggestions from students.

30. Pupils usually study 11.5 GCSE subjects from a very good range of subjects which includes three separate sciences and two modern languages plus Latin. Pupils follow a short GCSE examination course in religious education. The choice of subjects within design and technology is restricted to graphics, which does not meet the wishes of all pupils. The school is seeking a suitable course to provide pupils with further accreditation in ICT in Year 11. In the last three years, small numbers of girls have gained GCSE accreditation in Spanish, Greek, Russian and Urdu.

31. There is an appropriate balance of time between most subjects. However, the allocation of single periods to physical education restricts what can be done, as was noted in the last inspection report. Arrangements for reviewing the curriculum and for curriculum development generally are good, both at whole-school level and within departments. Schemes of work reflect the school's equal opportunities policy. They are comprehensive working documents, providing good guidance for staff and identifying progression in appropriate detail. The school's awareness of girls' academic needs results in work being very well targeted for the range of pupils within a group. All policies give good guidance on developing pupils' skills in literacy and numeracy.

32. The school has few pupils with special educational needs, and these needs are usually temporary. From time to time, few pupils have individual education plans to support provision in their education. Pupils and parents are involved in half-termly reviews for improvement and setting targets so teachers have guidance in helping pupils to reach their targets and all pupils are included very well. The school provides very well for these pupils.

33. The school provision for extra-curricular activities is very good. There are opportunities for extension, enrichment and enhancement for pupils in various curriculum areas. This includes music and drama, leading to opportunities for pupils to perform to a very high standard in a wide range of productions, ensembles and choirs. Varied sporting and athletic activities are available. Girls represent the school in a good range of sports and achieve representative honours. Several other departments also offer curriculum enrichment opportunities at lunch time and after school. A particular strength is the school's participation in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, in which girls regularly achieve the gold award. Extra-curricular activities, including residential visits, make a telling contribution to personal development.

34. The school prepares pupils well for later stages of learning and employment. The girls learn about the world of work in their PHSE lessons. The Year 9 careers day is very successful in helping girls choose their options for Year 10. Girls undertake two weeks of work experience in Year 11. Good preparation and follow-up enable girls to gain from this opportunity much useful understanding of the world of work and their own personal qualities. Less successful is the advice provided by an outside agency, which is not always appropriate to the girls' aptitudes or ambitions.

35. The school provides well-maintained accommodation of a high quality for pupils of all ages including those with disabilities. Displays around the school are excellent and create an attractive and welcoming learning environment. They are informative and successfully celebrate the achievements of pupils in all year groups. The premises are in very good decorative condition. Specialist facilities for mathematics, science, history, physical education, design technology, drama and music are particularly well suited to the courses taught. Other teaching areas provide good accommodation, apart from one art room where space is cramped, which restricts teaching and display. Physical education enjoys very good facilities for swimming which are shared with the boy's school. Storage and office space in physical education, however, is rather cramped. The canteen is too small, but an extension is planned. The hall provides a very attractive and comfortable environment for assemblies and other school functions. Library resources are well used by pupils. They have access throughout the school day and at various times after school. Teachers book the library for whole-class teaching and the librarian liaises with heads of department to ensure resources meet curricular needs. External areas are spacious, attractive and well maintained.

36. Resources are very good overall and meet the demands of the curriculum apart from ICT where pupils have insufficient access to facilities in several subjects. The overall provision for computers is 1:7, which is slightly below the current national ratio. Immediately before the inspection, the school suffered a burglary in which a significant number of laptop computers were stolen. These had not yet been replaced.

37. Staffing is very good. The school has a very well qualified staff, with a good mixture of very experienced and younger teachers, who are dedicated to doing their best for the girls. New staff are inducted well. A support teacher in the English department provides additional help for targeted pupils in the main school whose literacy requires support. Several good strategies have been introduced to reduce teachers' workloads, including employing examination invigilators. Non-teaching staff are frequently well qualified, and provide good support. Support staffing in science is comparatively low for the range of courses provided.

Sixth form

Main strengths

- The curriculum makes very good provision for girls' academic needs.
- Accommodation is very good.

The sixth form curriculum is very good. It maintains a very strong academic bias in accordance with the school's aims. Girls take up to five subjects in Year 12, including general studies. They choose from a range of 20 subjects. All, except Latin, are available to A2 level. In Year 13, students select from 15 subjects, which match the needs and wishes of students very well overall. All follow the general studies course. Religious education is taught through PHSE and occasional organised events, and this meets statutory requirements. A-Level music is provided in conjunction with the neighbouring boys' school. A small number of students have taken A-Levels in Russian and Urdu.

Resources for A-Level are good. Accommodation is very good and includes a new sixth form centre and social area which is shared with the boys' school.

Care, guidance and support

The school cares for, guides and supports girls **very well**. The focus on using data on individual progress to provide timely support is exceptionally strong. New pupils value the highly effective induction arrangements. The school surveys girls' views, but girls are not sure that their opinions have a real impact on policy making.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- A new pastoral team has set up robust procedures to ensure high quality care for all girls, linked to its skill in diagnosing and dealing with issues of individual progress.
- Excellent relationships among girls, plus their own strong rapport with individual teachers and tutors ensure that there is someone to turn to if problems arise.
- Arrangements to help girls new to the school to settle in are exceptionally good.
- Arrangements for health, safety and child protection are very effective.
- Guidance on the impact of course choices on what girls can do next is inconsistent.
- Girls of all ages are unsure that their views are sought and acted on in a spirit of meaningful consultation.

Commentary

38. Girls of all ages benefit significantly from the school's vibrant sense of community where all are welcome because they are there on merit, regardless of background. Outstanding relationships that exemplify social and racial harmony provide girls with informal systems of mutual support that complement the school's formal support systems impressively.

39. The positive, purposeful teamwork of the senior staff responsible for pastoral matters is focused sharply on ensuring that girls have every chance of achieving their academic and personal potential in full. In the past, inconsistencies in checking on personal well being, as well as academic progress, led to occasional weaknesses in the overall quality of support offered to individuals. A few parents noted examples. Inspectors found that since the appointment of the new pastoral team, the school has implemented rigorous checks on all aspects of progress, including any personal difficulties that may affect learning, and has very clear systems for dealing with problems. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Teachers and tutors know girls and their needs very well in general. Patterns in achievement, motivation, behaviour and attendance are analysed thoroughly, which enables tutors or teachers to give timely advice if problems arise. The school is particularly good at acknowledging great strides in progress with praise and formal rewards systems, including prizes and commendations. The *sunshine award* is a valuable initiative to celebrate development of personal qualities, with scope to involve girls in rewarding their peers for maturity and selflessness.

40. Girls in Year 7 regard induction arrangements as a real success story. Staff visit as many as they can of the 75 or so primary schools attended by new girls, in spite of the fact that these change year on year. Girls enjoy the taster lessons on their summer visit. They appreciate the way that sixth formers and staff take care of them. As a result, they settle in quickly, soon feel part of the school and are ready to enjoy all the opportunities offered, not least the chance to be with other able, avid learners.

41. Staff and governors are vigilant about the safety and maintenance of all buildings and equipment. Suitable risk assessments and policies such as Internet access ensure that girls can work in a safe and healthy environment. In addition, daily routines such as moving round the site and using laboratories are managed with scrupulous attention to health and safety. Thorough arrangements for child protection are in place, with care taken to ensure that all staff, including those new to the school know what to do if they have any concerns. First aid and welfare arrangements are very clear and well known to the girls, who have very good chances to recover in a very well equipped medical room if they feel unwell.

42. Careers advice for girls about to choose which courses to follow in the upper school is good. Girls are complimentary about the background work they do as part of their form time and the guidance available at options evening when they have helpful opportunities to discuss different courses. Some girls feel that implications of choices at 14 or 16 are not spelled out to prevent them closing doors to specific university courses inadvertently.

43. The school conducts regular surveys of girls' attitudes to work and levels of satisfaction with school life, often as part of wider assessments, such as those used to predict grades in public examinations. The school council is another forum for seeking pupils' views, but girls feel that it has not had an active enough role lately, which the school acknowledges. Staffing difficulties have had an impact on this. Within lessons, girls express their views in a highly articulate, mature and thoughtful manner. Their critical thinking skills are highly prized in lessons, if less obviously in everyday school life.

Sixth Form

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Induction to Year 12 is now highly effective.
- Girls have an exceptionally clear idea of how well they are doing because of regular, incisive feedback on their work and progress.
- The quality of guidance on making informed decisions about sixth form and university courses, including that from *Connexions* personal advisers, is inconsistent.
- Support on personal issues has improved after an unsettled period of staff turnover.

Commentary

44. Girls in Year 12 have found the induction period, including a stimulating residential visit to Cambridge University, invaluable. Staff and Year 13 girls accept that the previous year, this process was less effective because of unexpected staff changes. They feel that the school usually does its very best to ensure a smooth transition to the sixth form.

45. The school checks and reports on girls' academic performance with impressive care so that they know what they need to do to achieve the highest grades of which they are capable. As a result, timely interventions and high quality advice based on these checks ensure that any individual difficulties are dealt with well before examination periods.

46. In many cases, the support and encouragement offered by teachers is extraordinary. For the few girls who are insecure about current or future study, or who had to compromise over the mix of subjects studied to an advanced level, support is sometimes less assured. This is partly because changes of staff and girls' uncertainty of purpose have made it harder for them to develop a secure, trusting relationship with a tutor or teacher.

47. Access to well-informed advice is good, generally. It is much better in terms of progress than in relation to the process of making choices of what to do next. This is because girls find that the advice offered by *personal advisers* is too generalised and shows little understanding of how they approach decision-making about higher education or other options. Girls are deeply grateful for high quality guidance from individual teachers, which makes the process seem manageable and ensures that they feel that their choices are rational. The new staff responsible for this are already making significant improvements.

48. Sixth form girls have more open relationships with staff than they did lower down the school, which allows more sharing of views and understanding of how and when they can influence aspects of school life. The sixth form council, run jointly with the boys' school, has more freedom to consider matters that affect students directly, if it chooses to do so. In the past, its focus has been on social events such as the leavers' ball. It has just begun to review its terms of reference and decide on its priorities. Otherwise, the views of sixth formers are sought and considered through the same formal processes as in the main school. Girls remain unconvinced that their views are taken seriously and that the process of consultation is meaningful and involves everyone in the sixth form. Evidence from the inspection indicates that while the process of consultation may not be as well developed as in other sixth forms, it offers a secure basis for seeking girls' views.

49. The school expects girls to use initiative and independence in their work and in suggesting how they can serve or enrich the school community. When they propose projects or events that are well thought out and not disruptive to their studies, their proposals are received very well. This was evident in wholehearted support for sixth formers who organised a coffee morning to raise money for the Macmillan Appeal in memory of their friend.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

Parents are **very satisfied** with the quality of education offered by the school and the very high standards their daughters achieve. Links with parents are good, with exceptional encouragement from home for high achievement at school.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Links with parents are good and contribute to the successes girls achieve.
- Links with the community are good and enhance girls' achievements well.
- Links with other schools and colleges are very good, which helps with transition to and from the school.
- The process of seeking, considering and using parents' views to bring about improvement is less active than parents would wish.

Commentary

50. Parents are very clear about what the school offers and expects of their daughters. The school works effectively with parents to support girls with their learning and ambitions. It makes early contact with home when things seem to be going wrong. Parents are keen to play their part in ensuring that girls fulfil their potential. The school's keeps a sharp focus on maintaining a mutually supportive community of scholarship. A few parents find this a challenge and find the idea of 'no exceptions' to codes agreed by the governing body too inflexible. When the school succeeds in building parental trust and confidence in the way it works to support girls through difficult periods, the sense of partnership is extremely strong. Letters of appreciation for sensitive, high quality advice and support given by the school are very moving.

51. The school makes very good efforts to keep parents well informed about its life and work and particular achievements of individuals or groups of girls. Although until now parents have received just one very detailed annual report on progress, the school has initiated interim reports from this term in response to parental preference. The school's new pastoral team has very clear systems to ensure that parents are told promptly when their daughters show signs of struggling with subjects or school life in general. It is too soon to evaluate the impact of their commitment to better checks on personal and academic development. The inspection found that greater consistency of support for girls' personal and emotional wellbeing is now being achieved than some parent suggested at the parents' meeting.

52. Parents are unconvinced about the extent to which their views are sought and how they are used to influence school improvement. The school conducts surveys and asks for parents' comments on its work, for example, at the end of girls' reports. Very few parents respond to these chances to make their views known to the school. A few parents clearly feel that the school is not very receptive to ideas different from those of its managers.

53. Amongst the good links with the community is an arrangement between a major bank and the mathematics department which runs a school bank. Further examples are the well-established contacts with legal firms in the City of Birmingham provide good opportunities for work experience. Good contacts exist between the University and the chemistry department.

54. The school works very hard to ensure that its links with feeder schools and local colleges are used to best advantage to settle girls on entry to the school and to provide access for individuals to accredited courses, such as those in mother tongue languages. It uses its Beacon school status to excellent effect to provide support for and to work with other schools in the area, for example, in science.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management and governance of the school are **excellent**. The headteacher provides excellent leadership. She is dedicated to the philosophy of running a very highly-attaining school. Management of individual subjects is very good. Governors have a very thorough knowledge of the working of the school. They analyse results rigorously, and play a full part in monitoring developments and planning the school's future. All statutory duties are met except for the full use of ICT in design and technology.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher and others with senior posts of responsibility show outstandingly clear vision and commitment, and the senior team work together with cohesiveness and efficiency.
- Governors' have a very high level of understanding of the school and make a significant contribution to its effectiveness and direction.
- The school very successfully promotes the inclusion of all pupils.
- High reputation of the school, including Beacon School status.
- New staff are very well supported.
- The financial management of the school is very effective.
- The systematic monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is less well organised than other aspects.

Commentary

55. The headteacher, senior staff and governors have a very clear view of what the school should be doing. The school is clearly focused on academic excellence and is amongst the highest-attaining in the country. It is over-subscribed eight-fold. The most outstanding feature of the school is the exceptional self-enriching mix amongst the pupil body, in which a wide range of ethnic origins is represented. The school benefits from excellent leadership and management. This is a very significant factor in maintaining its success and reputation. The impact of the management's effectiveness benefits other schools and colleges, through the work carried out as result of its Beacon school status.

56. The excellent leadership of the headteacher is characterised by an outstandingly clear vision and dedication to maintaining the highest standards in all areas of the school's work. Because of the clarity of strategic direction, staff at all levels have a very clear awareness of this and the school's expectations of them. Recently, the school's management has worked very effectively to offset the impact of temporary staffing problems. An imaginative planned development with the boys' school is the provision of a crèche for the children of staff to alleviate such difficulties in the longer term.

57. The governors are very committed and fully involved in the development of the school. Though not involved individually with departments, they are very well informed about the school's achievements and fulfil their statutory duties very well. They analyse results rigorously and note trends from year to year to ensure that all departments are kept up to the mark. The school's strategic and shorter term planning is excellent and governors play a full part in deciding priorities for development and monitoring their implementation. The very high standard of development planning involves a three-year cycle with annual reviews against stringent criteria. Departmental planning is very good. It is linked to whole-school priorities and has appropriate timescales, criteria for success, costings and lines of accountability.

58. Key staff with leadership roles at senior and middle management levels make an outstanding contribution to the achievement of the school's goals. The senior leadership team succeeds in working as a highly cohesive unit. The deputy and assistant headteachers have very clearly defined roles, which they fulfil with high commitment, energy and effectiveness. Line management of subjects is very effective, and ensures that whole-school priorities are incorporated within departmental plans. Pastoral teams are very well managed so that they anticipate and provide very well for girls' academic and personal needs. As several heads of department have moved on to promotion elsewhere, it has very recently been necessary to appoint a number of relatively inexperienced replacement staff. They have been very well supported in taking up their new roles and are doing so with energy and commitment, already showing a clear awareness of the strengths of their departments and the areas in need of further improvement.

Subject leadership is very good overall, and excellent in science, art and music. In science, outstanding analysis of the work produced by pupils has had a considerable impact on styles and effectiveness of teaching, with a particular focus on making the subject attractive to girls. Leadership of art is highly successful in maintaining a consistent quality of teaching and learning. In music, high standards of teaching are supplemented by extra-curricular provision that is outstanding in quality. The overall strengths in leadership are not yet fully reflected in citizenship, which, although satisfactory, remains a developing subject.

59. The school has highly efficient, well organised, management systems. Individual pupils' results are closely analysed, to give a clear view of their progress and ensure that they continue to achieve very well. Procedures for introducing new staff to the school and for guiding and supporting newly qualified teachers, are excellent. Procedures for performance management reviews are good, but some inconsistency remains in the way in which departments use the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning to share and develop further the best practice. There is a perception in some departments that insufficient assistance is given by, for example, providing cover for heads of department so that they can observe the lessons of other teachers in their departments.

60. The financial management of the school is excellent. Financial reports for school managers and governors are prepared by the Birmingham LEA and by the King Edward VI Foundation. Many educational and financial benefits accrue to the school from its membership, with six other Birmingham schools, of the King Edward VI Foundation. Close and effective communication between the headteacher and the officers of the Foundation who are the clerk and secretary to the governing body ensures that financial information is both accurate and timely and that spending is very closely monitored. The most recent auditor's report shows that accounts are in order and that no changes or improvements to accounting practice are necessary. Since the last inspection, improvements have been made to the quality of financial planning and this is now of a very high standard.

61. Key financial decisions are made by the full governing body, based on recommendations from its finance committee. The principles of best value are carefully applied by both the governing body and the school leadership team. Links with the other schools in the Foundation allow costs to be compared directly with similar schools and savings on items such as energy, insurance and audit are made through competitive tendering as a group of schools. This makes best use of available resources to meet the educational priorities of the school. Reserves are healthy, but not excessive, and the budget for the current financial year shows a small surplus.

62. An active programme of refurbishment continues. Considerable capital investment has been made in developing facilities for art and design technology, and in improving the sixth form centre. Plans for a new sports centre, shared with the Camp Hill Boys' School, are currently being developed. Additional funding is also received through the school's involvement in 'Excellence in Cities', including Leadership Incentive Grant, and through its status as a Beacon school. These additional resources are being very effectively invested in improving the quality of provision.

63. Although spending per pupil is high compared with other schools, particularly in the sixth form, the school produces outstanding examination results at GCSE, AS Level and A-Level. The result is that the school, including the sixth form, offers excellent value for money. Spending per pupil in 2002/3 was particularly high because of substantial expenditure on capital projects.

Sixth form

Main strength

- Leadership and management are excellent.

Commentary

64. Leadership and management of the sixth form are excellent and display the same qualities found in the main school. The highly efficient way in which the school has organised recent changes in personnel has ensured that new key staff have been very strongly supported in taking up their roles. In particular, the new head of sixth form has settled in well and is already making what the girls regard as a valuable contribution to the running of the sixth form. Consequently, there has been both very good continuity, during the transition period and a current leadership that has a very strong commitment and awareness of the future direction of the sixth form. Overall, the sixth form continues to be a flourishing strength of the school, highly popular and very successful in terms of the achievement of its students. The quality of subject leadership is very good overall, and in some subjects it is excellent.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	3485047	Balance from previous year	277119
Total expenditure	3584272	Balance carried forward to the next	177893
Expenditure per pupil	4217		

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN AREAS OF LEARNING, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 and 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are consistently very high as a result of very good teaching.
- Lessons are enjoyable and highly productive and pupils are always fully involved in their work.
- Pupils are encouraged to excel in speaking and listening.
- Pupils' attitudes and behaviour in lessons are exceptionally good.
- Relationships between teachers and pupils and between the girls themselves are excellent.
- There is insufficient access to ICT for pupils and teachers in lessons.
- The tracking of pupils' progress and diagnostic assessment, particularly to support relatively low-attaining pupils in Years 7 to 9, is not yet fully developed.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Very high	Very high
Achievement	Excellent	Excellent
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Excellent
Management	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	Very good

65. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 are very high. GCSE results in both English and English literature are very high compared with similar schools, and well above average for grammar schools. Results have remained consistently high in recent years and pupils of all social and ethnic backgrounds do equally well.

66. In Years 7 to 9, pupils write with interest and fluency, developing their ideas with imagination and creativity. They grasp challenging literary texts, and read with understanding. From the start of their time in the school, they discuss and write about moral dilemmas and social issues. Pupils share ideas with enthusiasm and a true sense of intellectual curiosity. They work hard in lessons, and on homework tasks, and are motivated to set themselves very high standards. In Years 10 and 11, standards rise further as the pupils mature. They demonstrate the skills of critical analysis that leave them well prepared for A-Level study.

67. Achievement in lessons is excellent. In Year 7 pupils have already developed good literacy skills, but by Year 11 their ability to express ideas and shape complex arguments is outstanding. They show the confidence to perform and make presentations to a range of audiences. Their gains in understanding character, context and theme and their ability to recognise implicit meaning in the study of literature are excellent. Almost all pupils make very good progress in every year group, but a small number of pupils in Years 7 to 9 with relatively lower levels of prior attainment are not receiving enough support tailored to their needs so that they can catch up more quickly with their peers.

68. Teaching is very good. In the best lessons, skilful and careful planning provides a range of activities and a balance between whole-class, group, paired and individual working so that the interest and concentration of the girls are sustained. Teachers move the lesson forward at a lively pace matched to the rapid learning capacity of the pupils, and opportunities are provided for sustained collaborative and independent learning. Marking and assessment are generally thorough so that pupils know what they need to do in order to improve. In every year group, pupils' attitudes to lessons are very positive. Behaviour is excellent. Pupils enjoy lessons and are strong active learners, participating very effectively in a wide range of activities, and achieving the best they can.

69. The departmental management supports the ethos and the direction of the school. Responsibilities are clearly set out and understood. Documentation is of a very good standard and records are carefully kept. The leadership ensures that high standards are part of the everyday work of everyone in the department and there is a collective determination to offer the pupils only the very best. However, opportunities for the use of new technologies, such as digital projection and access to the Internet for research, are currently limited. Since the last inspection the English department has effectively maintained its very high quality of provision.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

70. Standards of literacy are very high across the school. Subjects other than English make a very good contribution to developing and maintaining these excellent standards. Pupils read with fluency and understanding in all subjects and undertake a wide range of writing of high quality, including news reports, letters and argument or persuasion, as well as factual writing. In art, science and physical education, pupils are encouraged to consider carefully the definitions of words and technical terms. In modern foreign languages, accuracy is highly prized and rewarded, and, from the start of Year 7, specific attention is given to the correct use of grammatical terms and parts of speech. In religious education, history and geography, many opportunities are provided for discussion and debate, helping to shape the excellent skills in speaking and listening that are a feature of the school.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths

- Very good teaching enables pupils to attain very high standards.
- Pupils' determination to participate in lessons helps them learn.
- The learning of two modern foreign languages is of great benefit to pupils' linguistic understanding.
- Planning is of a high standard.
- The leadership of the subject is clearly focused on high achievement.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Very high	Very high
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	Very good

71. The number of pupils attaining Levels 7 and 8 in Year 9 has increased in the last two years. GCSE results are very high in both French and German. In French in 2003, pupils achieved well in relation to their performance in other subjects.

72. Achievement is particularly impressive in Year 7 as teachers take every opportunity to accelerate pupils' learning. By the end of the year pupils are successfully using some of the language more commonly found at GCSE. In Years 8 and 9, the pace slows a little to allow some necessary consolidation and extension. By the end of Year 9, pupils' achievement in all skills is very good. This continues to be the case in Years 10 and 11 where pupils effortlessly and fluently respond to teachers' questions without reference to notes.

73. Since teachers use the foreign language for classroom management and teaching from Year 7, pupils' listening skills are highly developed. The constant focus on developing accuracy in all aspects of speaking and writing enables pupils to absorb quickly and manipulate language skilfully. The teachers' evident enthusiasm, the encouragement they provide and their regular informal assessment help pupils sustain their concentration and interest in fast-paced lessons. Occasionally, teaching does not take sufficient account of the needs of lower-attaining pupils.

74. Pupils progress very quickly because they are constantly challenged to think for themselves, for example by inferring meanings and patterns. They are given good opportunities to apply their knowledge in practice. They have a very 'can-do' attitude to learning, are very responsive and eager to participate in all activities, especially paired work where they take responsibility for furthering their learning in a most mature way. Excellent classroom relationships encourage them to support and learn from each other.

75. Curricular arrangements in Years 7 to 9 provide very good opportunities for all pupils as French and German have full parity and are equally successful. The absence of setting is, in most respects, a plus factor as lower-attaining pupils respond to the challenge to give of their best to keep up with the others. Teachers are very effectively deployed.

76. The head of department leads a high quality team, dedicated to furthering pupils' achievement. Teachers transmit to pupils a passion for, and enjoyment of languages. Planning is of a high standard and all developments are rigorously evaluated to ensure that the high standard of provision is maintained. A very good planned development is the three-way link with schools in France and Germany to provide enrichment in the girls' language development. Leaders effectively evaluate the progress of the department to inform curriculum development. Schemes of work are sufficiently flexible for colleagues to teach them according to their own strengths and personality. A good range of opportunities for using ICT is incorporated in the schemes of work, although access to computers is not as regular as it might be. Since the last inspection, standards have been maintained, and in some respects, improved. Teaching is now uniformly very good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at the end of Year 9 and Year 11 are outstanding.
- Teachers have expert subject knowledge and a real enthusiasm for mathematics.
- Excellent relationships exist between pupils and teachers, promoting a strong work ethic.
- Leadership of the department is very good, and management is excellent.
- The very good and excellent practice in the department could be shared more systematically amongst teachers.
- ICT is used well to support some aspects of pupils' learning, but it is not used enough to make teachers' presentations to classes more engaging.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Very high	Very high
Achievement	Excellent	Excellent
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Excellent
Progress since the last inspection	Good

77. The percentage of girls from all social and ethnic backgrounds gaining Level 8 at the end of Year 9 is well above the national average and continuing to rise. Standards and results at the end of Year 11 are very high. Almost all pupils achieve excellently in relation to their prior attainment, and gain very high grades at GCSE. Teachers have high expectations of all pupils, and Year 11 pupils are given opportunities to learn advanced mathematical techniques beyond those required at this age. All pupils demonstrate excellent recall of mathematical knowledge and retention of skills learned previously.

78. Pupils have well-honed numeracy skills. Their use of algebraic techniques is impressive. In Year 9 pupils use small whiteboards to write algebraic expressions for statements such as '3 more than double a number' and solve linear equations such as $2(3x-4)-3(7-3x)=4(5-3x)+1$. Year 11 pupils work confidently with difficult algebraic terms to derive the formula used to solve equations.

79. In the best lessons, teachers' expert subject knowledge and enthusiasm for mathematics are used to engage all pupils in challenging activities. For example, pupils in Year 7 created human representations of graphical forms, and linked these with the equation of a line. Year 8 pupils were encouraged to reflect on their knowledge about the rhombus to give a simple proof for the construction of a perpendicular bisector. Year 11 pupils used graphical calculators to explore the relationship between the roots of an equation and point of intersection with the x-axis. Teachers know their pupils well, and know exactly what they need to do next to deepen their understanding. They use skilful questions which allow pupils to explain their thinking, and create a learning environment where excellent relationships mean that pupils are not afraid to make mistakes. Where teaching and learning are not quite as good, pupils are not excited by the activities they are given, and sometimes spend too long copying notes from the board.

80. The head of department has a commitment to continual improvement and an exciting vision for the future. Some opportunities exist for teachers to watch each other's lessons, and teachers are beginning to identify areas of expertise in the department that can be shared by everyone, this procedure is not yet implemented systematically. Management of the department is excellent. Analysis of data is expert and thorough and is used to establish curriculum targets for groups of pupils. Schemes of work are comprehensive and identify a useful range of teaching resources which are organised centrally. The department is well resourced. Monitoring and evaluation of the department's work has improved since the last inspection. The amount of very good and better teaching has increased in all years.

Mathematics across the curriculum

81. Messages from the Key Stage 3 Strategy for numeracy across the curriculum have been implemented very well in the school. Key departments, such as science and geography, have systematically planned the development of numeracy into their schemes of work. Excellent practice was seen in science, where Year 12 students interpreted aspects of geometry and trigonometry in astrophysics. Year 11 geography students used a range of graphs and calculations to support hypotheses about similarities and differences between urban and suburban areas of Birmingham. Pupils throughout the school are extremely numerate, and have a good range of mental calculation strategies which they use and apply confidently.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **excellent**.

Main strengths

- Pupils have excellent attitudes and achieve very well.
- Leadership and management are excellent, supported by a very committed team of teachers.
- Very good accommodation and resources.
- Teaching over time is very good.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Very high	Well above average
Achievement	Excellent	Excellent
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership	Excellent
Management	Excellent
Progress since the last inspection	Very good

82. Results in the end of Year 9 tests in 2002 were very high with 76 per cent of students gaining Level 7 or above. These standards have been maintained over the last three years, and in the 2003 tests. GCSE results in 2002 were well above average in chemistry and biology and above average in physics, with the proportion of A* and A grades also above average. Results have been maintained in 2003.

83. Pupils have very good literacy and numeracy skills on entry, which the department develops further through their teaching. Students are highly motivated. They come to lessons prepared and ready to work. They work very well together and support each other's learning.

84. During the inspection, teaching and learning were very good throughout Years 7 to 11, with some examples of excellence. In the best of lessons, teachers use their excellent subject knowledge to plan a challenging variety of activities. They use question and answer techniques very well to promote and check learning. Students are given good opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. In a Year 11 biology lesson, students were given a challenging question about the differences between two foxgloves at the start of the lesson followed by opportunities to work as a class and independently in pursuit of the answer. The students were very focused as they discussed and recorded information. As a result of the teacher's clear explanations, they acquired and used accurately technical vocabulary, such as 'chemotropic' and 'phototropic'. Teachers manage the classes and time extremely well so that lessons have a lively pace, which enhances learning. Students are given the opportunity to prepare and give presentations. In an excellent Year 10 chemistry lesson, students and teacher worked enthusiastically to prepare posters and

speeches about a limestone enquiry. Students made expert use of source material as they worked. They were able to handle impromptu questions about the topic with aplomb and ingenuity. In a Year 8 biology lesson, students were given the opportunity to choose their own starting point. They did this very sensibly. Several groups chose to use the reference books provided because they could tackle the other questions at home in their own time. Interactions between the teacher and the students were very productive and there was an excellent working atmosphere in the lesson. In some lessons, though good overall, students were not given enough opportunity to contribute and this made the pace rather laborious.

85. The department is extremely well organised, with each science having an extensive scheme of work. Individuals' strengths are used to the full. There is a clear vision for the department to maintain high standards, whilst catering for the needs of all. The department thinks deeply about its work and all members contribute to its development. The impressive database, used to forecast and track performance, enables the teachers to know individual performance well. The Beacon status of the science department allows it to share its excellent practice with others. The department has a very good suite of seven laboratories which are very well maintained. Technical support is very good but is stretched with only two full-time equivalent staff to service a large department.

86. A feature which stimulates and supports the achievement of students is the science club, which links the lower school to sixth form project leaders. A mentoring system links 60 Year 11 students with sixth form students studying science. Since the last inspection, the high levels of achievement have been maintained and teaching is now very good overall.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' good specialist subject knowledge is used effectively to guide pupils' learning and progress.
- Pupils' excellent attitudes contribute significantly to their progress.
- Standards are well above average at the end of Years 9 and 11.
- Pupils' achievement is very good, despite insufficient opportunities to experience control technology.
- The use of ICT in other subjects of the curriculum to support learning, although satisfactory, is inconsistent.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

87. GCSE results in 2002 were well above average in the full course in Year 11 and in the short course at the end of Year 9. These high results have been consistently maintained over recent years. Although these results are well above the national average, the girls do not achieve as well in ICT as in their other subjects.

88. Pupils join the school with average ICT skills but, with the benefit of good teaching and teachers' high expectations, their progress is rapid and their achievement is very good. By the end of Year 9, pupils have a good understanding of how to present information, using desk-top publishing techniques to design documents with a particular audience mind. This was very apparent in an illustrated children's book topic, where pupils used appropriate technical vocabulary and skilfully downloaded pictures from the Internet. Pupils have a good understanding of the use of spreadsheets. They are able to give examples of where they might be used and explain the formulae for mathematical calculations.

89. Pupils in Year 11 have a good knowledge of data handling. They enter the information into the appropriate areas and understand well how to select information. They know the benefits of using ICT, and select suitable techniques for different tasks. Pupils' knowledge of control technology is not as good as it should be. This is due to the lack of opportunities to study this element in depth. The school is aware of this and plans are in hand to include this component more fully.

90. Lessons are well planned and teachers use their good subject knowledge effectively to guide pupils' learning. Teachers are well informed about the requirements of the course and the examination criteria. Pupils' learning reflects the standards of teaching. They understand how they are progressing and how they may improve their work. Teachers' good management skills and the individual help they give in lessons ensure that learning is brisk. Although lessons observed finished with opportunities for checking what had been learnt, these were often brief, with limited opportunities for pupils to present and talk about their own work. The lack of a projector for teachers to demonstrate techniques to whole classes meant that not all pupils understood, and time was spent re-explaining some procedures, which slowed the pace of learning.

91. The head of department has had responsibility for the subject only since the beginning of the term and has, as yet, to have an impact. He has, however, a clear vision for the development of the subject by raising standards further broadening the curriculum. The subject is placed well for future developments.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

92. At the time of the last inspection, the report stated that where pupils were using ICT in other subjects, the progress was satisfactory. Although there has been some improvement there are still subjects that are not using ICT sufficiently to support pupils' learning. Its use is clearly embedded in some subjects but overall its use is inconsistent. The total number of computers per pupil is less than normally seen. This is presenting a problem for some departments as access to the well-used computer suites is limited. Good practice, however, was seen in mathematics, where pupils used programs for graph plotting, logo and to aid calculations. ICT is underused in art, religious education, music and design and technology. The school has firm plans to increase resources in the near future.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good and pupils learn very effectively.
- Pupils display excellent attitudes which enhance their achievement.
- Results and standards in class are very high.
- ICT is under-used.
- Marking does not always contain enough guidance for pupils on how to improve.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Very high	Very high
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

93. Teacher assessments in 2003 indicated standards that are very high in Year 9. This is supported by evidence from the inspection. GCSE results are also very high.

94. By the end of Year 9, pupils have acquired very good geographical vocabulary and have developed skills in the analysis and interpretation of data, graphs and diagrams which enable them to make very good judgements. They can draw well-founded conclusions from rainfall and temperature graphs to describe climate and account for differences. They understand well the reasons for the distribution and growth of population.

95. By the end of Year 11, the skills learned in Year 9 have developed significantly in preparation for GCSE. They use these skills very effectively to help them describe differences in farming between developed and underdeveloped countries. They have a good knowledge and understanding of places in the world, particularly through their work on urbanisation and tourism. The development of literacy skills is very good. They use key words accurately and develop their understanding and confidence in extended discussion. They use a good range of styles in their writing and write at length. The development of numeracy skills in geography is also very good, particularly through their use in the analysis and interpretation of statistics and graphs. Opportunities to develop both knowledge and understanding of citizenship and some of the relevant skills are regularly provided. A good example of this is the substantial work on environmental issues, both national and global, where pupils learn how decisions are made. Opportunities to develop their ICT skills are, however, restricted by insufficient access to resources.

96. Lessons are very well planned, teachers have excellent subject knowledge and use a wide range of stimulating teaching methods. Relationships are excellent. In all lessons observed, the pupils had many opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning and to discuss and develop their ideas with other pupils. They work very well co-operatively and concentrate for long periods. In a very good Year 8 lesson, where pupils were learning how rivers shape the land, the teacher set out clear aims for the lesson. A very good question-and-answer session involved all pupils and explored their prior knowledge. The pupils made very good progress because of the teacher's clear and detailed explanations and the availability of a very good range of resources. Homework was used well to reinforce learning. Occasionally, too much time is spent reinforcing prior knowledge or repeating previously learnt skills, and sometimes activities did not extend the most able girls. In a Year 7 lesson, many pupils were covering old ground and not making the progress that could have been made.

97. Detailed schemes of work provide appropriate guidance for teaching. The subject development plan identifies appropriate areas for improvement. Pupils work is regularly marked, but corrections do not always focus sufficiently on the improvement of grammar and spelling, and targets for improvement are not indicated regularly enough. The use of ICT since the last inspection has shown insufficient improvement, but in other respects, improvement has been good.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils achieve very well and reach very high standards.
- Pupils show excellent attitudes and readily respond to ideas and challenges.
- The very good and sometimes excellent teaching challenges all pupils.
- Marking is excellent and strongly supported by oral feedback and self-evaluation.
- Very good opportunities are provided to improve and apply literacy skills.
- Not enough opportunities are planned for developing ICT and citizenship.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Very high	Very high
Achievement	Excellent	Excellent
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Good
Management	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

98. The results of teachers' assessments of pupils' work were very high in 2002. The most recent assessments, made in 2003, match these. The standards of current Year 9 pupils are also very high. Pupils use source materials very effectively when learning how the factory system developed in the Industrial Revolution. They formed intelligent conclusions and lucidly expressed these orally and in writing.

99. The 2002 GCSE results were very high and were at a similar level in 2003. A significantly higher proportion of pupils take the examination than in most schools. Standards of discussion were high, for example, when pupils discussed the failure of the League of Nations and its relevance to the outbreak of the Second World War. These standards are being maintained in the current Year 11.

100. The pupils build effectively on the very high standards with which they enter the school. The active response of pupils, which is generally very good and often excellent, is an important factor in their excellent achievement. They volunteer to answer questions and ask thoughtful ones of their own. They do their homework with a thoroughness that impacts significantly on their progress.

101. Teachers make very good use of the pupils' willingness to contribute strongly to their own achievement by providing opportunities for independent research and thought. A group of Year 11 girls, when reporting back on their research into the role of women in the Second World War, used the opportunity to ask other pupils thoughtful and relevant questions. Teachers involve all girls well by diligently supporting individual pupils. Discussions are very lively and productive. Skills in the interpretation of historical sources are very well practised. Teachers provide many opportunities for girls to improve and apply their literacy skills, through reading widely, writing in a variety of forms and speaking and listening in small-group and whole-class activities. Standards of marking and oral feedback to girls on their work are very high. They perceptively evaluate their own work, and, overall, gain a very clear idea of how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve.

102. Standards have improved since the last inspection. History provides the girls with very good opportunities to develop their literacy. Teaching is of a more consistently high standard. There remains, however, a need for more systematic planning for using ICT and citizenship. Although longer term development has been interrupted by absence of key staff, leadership and management are good, and the school has maintained a consistently high standard of provision. The Key Stage 3 Strategy contributes very well to improvement.

Example of outstanding practice

In a Year 10 history lesson, the teacher challenged the full range of ability and harnessed the pupils' enthusiasm to produce a very high quality of learning.

The topic was the reparations inflicted on Germany at the end of the First World War. Outstandingly positive relationships allowed the teacher and all pupils to work together to secure excellent achievement. In a highly challenging exercise, each pupil was required to state a different and relevant piece of information about the Treaty of Versailles. That all did so instantly is high testament to the security of their earlier learning and to their alertness of mind. The teacher carefully controlled the order in which pupils were asked for their contribution, with lower-attainers having a relatively easy task because they were asked first, while the highest-attainers, asked last, were highly challenged by having to think of something nobody else had said. This made it an excellent example of matching challenge to capability. Following activities, in which the pupils studied a series of cartoons and discussed the way in which these convey messages and interpretations, were equally relevant and stimulating. Learning was very effectively consolidated, and once again the pupils' excellent attitudes maximised their achievement.

Religious education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in all years.
- Teaching is very good, with excellent leadership of discussions.
- Leadership and management are very effective.
- ICT is not used in lessons.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Very good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	Very good

103. Standards in religious education in Years 7 to 9 are well above those expected by the locally agreed syllabus. The teaching motivates pupils to achieve very well.

104. In the 2002 short course GCSE, 98 per cent of pupils gained grades A* to C. All pupils in Years 10 and 11 are now working towards a GCSE short course examination. Standards of work in Years 10 and 11 are well above average. Pupils are achieving very well throughout the subject.

105. By Year 9, pupils recognise that religious education involves the active acquirement of knowledge and understanding about various aspects of world religions. Standards of discussion are high. For example, in a Year 8 lesson, pupils talked astutely about '*Why is prayer important?*'.

106. In Year 11, girls discuss moral issues, such as prejudice, with maturity, drawing perceptively on their own experiences to exemplify their views. The excellent relationships amongst the girls enhance the quality of discussion because the girls listen to and responsibly consider points of view other than their own. They speak and exchange ideas confidently. Girls used intelligent discussion and research to write about how people's idea of God changes as they grow up. The diversity of pupils' religious and ethnic backgrounds enriches all aspects of their work in religious education. The study of Christianity and the major world religions makes a very good contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. In all lessons, opportunities are given for the discussion of beliefs and values and for pupils to think and reflect.

107. Teaching strengths lie in the teachers' very good subject knowledge and the interesting variety of teaching methods they use. Teachers' leadership of discussion is excellent. Teaching matches the needs of all pupils and teachers' expectations are high.

108. The school has recently appointed an experienced head of department who has introduced thorough assessment systems. Assessment in lessons and of work seen in Years 7 to 11 is very good. Some classes are taught in non-specialist rooms and this environment is not as stimulating as the designated room. Although pupils use ICT at home, opportunities are not yet provided within religious education lessons.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good teaching and learning ensure pupils make very good progress.
- Pupils gain very good GCSE results in Year 10.
- New leadership has created a strong sense of common direction.
- Teachers are caring and have complementary specialist subject skills.
- The allocation of time in Years 7 to 9 is below that envisaged.
- Pupils have insufficient opportunities to use ICT.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 10
Standards	Above average	Very high
Achievement	Very good	Excellent
Teaching and learning	Very good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	Satisfactory

109. Teacher assessments in Year 9 indicate standards that are above average, and this was reflected in work seen. In Years 7 to 9, standards are above average and pupils' achievement is good. Pupils design work in all years is well above average. Results in the GCSE examination, which the girls take in Year 10, were very high in 2002 and similar in 2003. By Year 10, coursework is highly creative and imaginative. Research tasks are very well managed by all pupils and the depth of analysis is excellent. Practical skills are highly developed in graphics, good in textiles, but slightly less developed in resistant materials and food technology.

110. Teachers plan lessons well. They have high expectations of pupils and good subject knowledge, and they guide pupils in a helpful and caring manner. Pupils learn very well and are enthusiastic about their work. Objectives for lessons are carefully explained and this helps them understand what they will learn. A good pace of learning is maintained. For example, in a Year 7 textiles lesson, pupils progressed quickly and produced imaginative work when the teacher set a challenging deadline for a drawing task involving the design of a soft book. Resources, such as books, samples of work, wall displays and products, are used well to stimulate discussion and help pupils formulate design ideas. Teachers use practical demonstrations effectively when helping girls to gain new skills. In a Year 8 lesson, the teacher demonstrated a variety of graphic techniques that pupils could readily apply to their design for a clock. This inspired and helped them to produce better work. Year 9 pupils have gained considerable success in national competitions for their graphics in a packaging competition. Overall, pupils make insufficient use of computers when designing.

111. Assessment is excellent in Year 10, pupils are kept well informed of their progress and use this information to amend and improve their work. The girls take great pride in their work and are strongly committed to achieving success. Many spend considerable time at home ensuring that their work is well presented. However, assessment is inconsistent in Years 7 to 9.

112. The teachers share a common sense of direction under their new head of department. Teachers provide good extra-curricular access to the department on a rota basis. Rooms have been refurbished to a high standard, and examination results have improved significantly. Two technicians make a valuable contribution to the department. Time allocation for Year 7 to 9 remains inadequate to teach the full breadth of the required curriculum. Year 7 pupils do not receive homework and this hampers their progress. The GCSE curriculum is limited at present and offers only a single GCSE option.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **excellent**.

Main strengths and areas for improvement

- Standards of work are well above average.
- Excellent teaching leads to excellent achievement.
- Pupils strive to do well and have excellent attitudes.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- Pupils have too few opportunities to use computers.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Well above average
Achievement	Excellent	Excellent
Teaching and learning	Excellent	Excellent

Leadership	Excellent
Management	Excellent
Progress since the last inspection	Good

113. GCSE results in 2002 were well above the national average, when compared to all schools and when compared to girls' performance nationally. The results for 2003 show an increase in the number of girls achieving A* and A grades.

114. Girls enter the school with average knowledge, understanding and skills. By the end of Year 9, they are already reaching well above average standards in their technical skills and their knowledge and understanding of artists. Observational drawing skills are excellent. In Years 10 and 11, girls maintain these high standards, and some pupils reach exceptional standards. GCSE project work showed wide exploration of the work of other artists, extensive experimentation and excellent technical skills.

115. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and plan lessons carefully to present learning as graduated steps. They make very effective use of mini-displays in lessons. These include the key points of the lesson, questions to prompt pupils' thinking, and work by girls and teachers that shows good practice. This helps the girls make very good progress. In a Year 10 lesson, pencil drawings of the different textures of soft toys were very realistic. Pupils set themselves very high standards and are very committed to achieving them. They concentrate hard for long periods. Their sketchbooks show great care and attention. Teachers insist on very high standards, but provide pupils with very good support and guidance. From Year 9, good opportunities are provided for girls to develop their own ideas in addition to exploring the techniques of a good range of artists. Girls respond very well to these opportunities. They make purposeful use of the very good selection of books in the library. Overall, the use of computers is inadequate.

116. The strong focus on high standards in all aspects of the department ensures that approaches to teaching are consistently very good. The teachers work in close collaboration. The new art room is an excellent, but the second classroom is small and limits some activities.

Drama

Provision in drama is **excellent**.

Main strengths

- Examination results are very high.
- Teaching is of exceptionally high quality.
- Pupils perform confidently.
- Drama is highly valued by the pupils because it is fun and enriching.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Very high
Achievement	Excellent	Excellent
Teaching and learning	Excellent	Excellent

Leadership	Excellent
Management	Very good
Progress since the last inspection	Very good

117. GCSE results in drama are well above the national average. Results have remained consistently very high in recent years and pupils of all social and ethnic backgrounds do equally well.

118. Work at the start of the course is already close to a good examination standard, and a large majority of pupils progress to reach the highest grades by the end of Y11. Pupils are skilful at researching the social and historical contexts of drama texts as a basis for devised pieces. They understand the technical and practical aspects of stagecraft, such as movement, gesture and expression. In a lesson on the topic of 'movement in improvisation', pupils discussed and

demonstrate the difference between polished and spontaneous improvisation. They interpret character and theme and evaluate their own performances with insight. In all the lessons seen, all pupils showed excellent gains in knowledge and understanding and in the practical skills integral to the subject.

119. Teachers have wide-ranging subject knowledge. Planning balances practical activity with whole-class teaching and includes evaluation by pupils, providing an excellent structure for learning. Practical activities are built into the lesson in short and very effective bursts, developing skills such as relaxation, concentration, voice control and projection. The teacher uses clear explanations and demonstrations to illustrate key learning points. Links are made between work devised and presented by the pupils and performances by professional companies which they have seen. Positive and supportive assessment identifies key learning points for improvement, particularly in student self-evaluation pieces. Pupils are uninhibited as learners and confident in performance and improvisation. They have very good collaborative skills and they work independently, enthusiastically and conscientiously to improve their dramatic skills. Engagement and enjoyment of the highest order are shown by the pupils in drama lessons. Pupils' achievement in relation to their abilities and starting points is excellent throughout the subject.

120. Leadership demonstrates a strong vision of how the subject can benefit the personal and social development of the pupils. The curriculum comprehensively covers the requirements of the examination syllabus and extends learning beyond those requirements, so that pupils are well prepared for AS level study by the end of the course. There are good links with practice in English lessons, which means that pupils starting the course in Year 10 already have a good grasp of basic skills and techniques and are ready to make fast progress as a result. The well-equipped drama studio has sound and lighting systems, good floor space for practical activity and blackout facilities.

121. The department has worked very effectively to sustain the very high quality of provision. The number of pupils electing to take this option is increasing because of the excellent reputation which drama enjoys in the school.

Music

Provision in music is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are very high and numbers taking the examination have increased since the last inspection.
- Standards are well above average at the end of Year 9, with almost all pupils exceeding the national expectation.
- Teaching and learning are excellent overall.
- Many pupils achieve very high standards in performance.
- Leadership and management are strong and highly effective.
- ICT is an area for development.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Well above average	Very high
Achievement	Very good	Excellent
Teaching and learning	Very good	Excellent

Leadership	Excellent
Management	Excellent
Progress since the previous inspection	Very good

122. Girls attain standards that are well above average in Year 9, and their achievement is very good. The number of girls opting for the full GCSE course has increased since the last inspection. GCSE results in 2002 were very high and similar in 2003, and pupils' achievement is excellent.

123. Teachers are experienced and they work with pace, enthusiasm and good humour to promote high standards of learning. Collaborative group work is a key feature of lessons. Composition and the development of pupils' aural perception are appropriately prominent in planning and teaching. Teachers' expectations are very high, and tasks are well-suited to the learning styles of the majority of girls, who work eagerly and show great staying power. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, pupils worked assiduously in small groups on a composition task, which challenged them to produce an interesting piece using a restricted number of notes. Similarly, in a Year 11 GCSE class, pupils worked in three groups on composing in a twentieth century style by including atonality, bi-tonality and polytonality. They then listened to Stravinsky's 'Rite of Spring'. In this way, their understanding and knowledge of the composer's craft was enhanced through their own attempts to use the same techniques. Positive and supportive assessment identifies key learning points for improvement, particularly in student self-evaluation pieces.

124. Well over 200 girls learn a wide range of instruments through a subsidised scheme, which is a significantly larger proportion than is usually the case. The school builds on this by providing a wide range of excellent extra-curricular activities, many of which are shared with the boys' school. Over fifty pupils attend the senior concert band which is one among six such large ensembles. Rehearsals taken by the head of department are very well-disciplined and high standards are achieved.

125. Excellent leadership and management ensure the efficient organisation of the department and the large team of instrumental teachers. The department benefits from the support of a technician whose preparation of rooms for rehearsals saves valuable time. The girls clearly enjoy their lessons and benefit from the orderly and well-structured approach the department provides for them. Accommodation and resources are very good, except for a lack of ICT. Overall, the improvement since the last inspection has been very good. There is scope in lesson planning to develop a broader approach to cultural diversity in the teaching of music.

Physical education

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average in Year 11.
- Excellent extra-curricular activities give opportunities for girls to participate at a very high level.
- Teaching is very good and pupils learn well.
- The curriculum is very well planned to include all pupils.
- Leadership is innovative and very good.
- Pupils do not receive sufficient guidance on attainment levels, but are helped to identify areas for improvement in most lessons.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Above average	Well above average
Achievement	Good	Very good
Teaching and learning	Good	Very good

Leadership	Very good
Management	Good
Progress since the last inspection	Good

126. Pupils do not take examinations in physical education.

127. Girls have had varied experiences in physical education in the many primary schools from which they come. Several have had little experience and standards are below average at the beginning of Year 7. By Year 9, standards are above average and teachers have graded pupils accurately. Pupils achieve well in relation to their previous learning. In Year 11 standards are well above average, particularly in activities followed through the school, and pupils achieve very well. The ablest team players reach very high standards indeed, and some girls represent the school at area and county level. Some pupils of Asian origin achieve less well than other pupils because they are less committed and do not develop techniques and skills as effectively over time.

128. Throughout the subject, teachers demonstrate well, give clear explanations and rigorously challenge pupils. For example, in a Year 7 gymnastics lesson, the teacher helped pupils to understand how a sequence of movement was put together by comparing it to the construction of a sentence; this prompted pupils to improve their literacy and be very clearly aware of the importance of a good beginning and an effective full stop in their sequences. In the same lesson, the teacher catered well for the needs of pupils at different stages of learning. Pupils were given a menu of possible movements to create their sequences so all pupils were able to select movements within their range of ability and fulfil the task. Learning is enhanced by pupils' high levels of attendance and very good attitudes.

129. Teachers usually review learning well to check understanding and consolidate knowledge before moving on to new work, but aims of lessons are not always sufficiently shared with pupils. Pupils are not in general well informed about their standards. Talented pupils are encouraged to participate in extra-curricular work and teams. They demonstrate in lessons, assist with umpiring and arrange tournaments. Participation rates are high and teachers involve non-participant pupils in the learning so they achieve as much as possible in the lesson.

130. Leadership of the department is innovative. The school has responded well to the underachievement of some Asian pupils by extending the curriculum, for example, to include cricket. The department has made good improvements since the last inspection. Facilities have improved and are good, but storage and staff accommodation are cramped. The department pays good attention to girls' safety. Outdoor courts, considered hazardous in the last report, have been resurfaced. Gifted and talented funding has been used to make good improvements to gymnastic equipment. The organisation of the department is good, but some single lessons, as mentioned in the previous report, are still timetabled, and pupils and teachers are pushed to achieve in the limited activity time left after changing and reaching playing areas. Resources are good but access to ICT is not always easy and this is under-used.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Overall provision in citizenship is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have very good enquiry and communication skills.
- Outside speakers make a very good contribution to pupils' understanding.
- The introduction of citizenship was well planned as part of PHSE.
- Pupils do not recognise citizenship as a separate subject.
- The teaching of citizenship is not monitored to ensure that all aspects are covered.

Commentary

	Year 9	Year 11
Standards	Average	Average
Achievement	Satisfactory	Satisfactory
Teaching and learning	Satisfactory	Satisfactory

Leadership	Satisfactory
Management	Satisfactory
Progress since the last inspection	Not applicable

131. Form tutor time takes place once weekly and this includes citizenship and careers and supplements contributions from other subjects to the personal, social and health education (PHSE) programme. Pupils' very good standards of discussion and understanding means that, despite the informal nature of citizenship as a subject, pupils attain above average understanding in the relevant topics they discuss. They develop a good sense of responsibility towards themselves and others through their participation in school and community activities. Their knowledge and understanding of government, law and economics are above average.

132. During the inspection, no citizenship lessons were seen, although several lessons were seen which incorporated aspects of citizenship. In these lessons, objectives and the contribution to the learning in citizenship were not made clear. Coverage of the key components was, therefore, incidental. Where teachers make links with citizenship, pupils make valuable connections. In a Year 10 mathematics lesson, pupils were working out real life problems involving money, which led to stimulating discussions on the reasons why people save and the advantages and disadvantages of credit cards. They were aware of the importance of these topics, and that they formed part of learning about citizenship because the teacher had made this clear to them.

133. The school prepared well for introducing citizenship by planning which subjects would contain elements of the course and incorporating relevant topics in PHSE. Planning in PHSE is very good overall and a comprehensive scheme of work guides the teaching. However, not all form tutors are comfortable in teaching PHSE and teaching standards is inconsistent. Outside speakers enrich the provision and some opportunities exist for pupils to assist in the community. For example, in Year 10, pupils organise a senior citizens' party.

PHSE is very well led and several teachers manage aspects of the course well. All teachers are able to contribute to the evaluation of the course and this has resulted in improvements. In May 2003 a new scheme of work, designed to meet some suggestions from senior pupils, came into use. In respect of citizenship, however, no monitoring has been carried out to ensure that all the elements of the course have been covered, or to evaluate the quality of the teaching. Positive and supportive assessment identifies key learning points for improvement, particularly in student self-evaluation pieces.

134. The school council provides the pupils with an opportunity to voice their views, but is not fully effective. Meetings have not been very frequent and pupils' do not feel that their views are acted upon sufficiently.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The tables below show entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001. Validated information is not yet available for examinations taken in 2002.

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics AS Level	3	67	62	67	15	3.0	1.5

Level 3 GCE A level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and Design	4	100	96	75	46	9.0	6.6
Biology	49	96	88	47	34	6.6	5.3
Business Studies	16	94	92	50	32	7.1	5.5
Chemistry	50	98	90	68	43	7.2	5.9
Communication Studies	6	100	93	67	31	7.0	5.5
English literature	22	100	95	68	37	7.7	5.9
French	11	100	89	73	38	8.5	5.6
Full Design and Technology	4	100	91	75	30	8.0	5.4
General Studies	98	97	85	66	30	7.1	4.9
Geography	10	100	92	70	38	8.0	5.7
German	3	100	91	67	40	8.0	5.8
History	15	100	88	60	35	7.5	5.5
Mathematics	56	98	87	80	43	8.4	5.8
Music	5	100	93	40	35	7.6	5.7
Other Social Studies	19	100	87	74	34	8.0	5.3
Physics	22	95	88	64	40	7.5	5.7
Religious Studies	5	100	92	20	38	5.2	5.8

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English language and literature is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at AS Level and A-Level are well above average.
- Expectations of the most able students are very high and they produce outstanding work.
- Teaching is excellent, particularly in developing critical and analytical skills.
- Assessment is very effective, and students know what they need to do to improve.
- Students develop outstanding discussion skills and show an excellent capacity for independent learning.
- Lessons are aimed to stretch the most able student, and planning for the relatively lower-attaining students does not always fully meet their needs.

Commentary

Year 13			
Standards	Well above average	Leadership	Excellent
Achievement	Excellent	Management	Very good
Teaching and learning	Excellent	Progress since the last inspection	Very good

135. Results have remained consistently high over recent years. The standards attained by students in are often exceptional. Work seen during the inspection reflected the pattern of examination result, with many individuals working at or even beyond the highest grades. Some work matched the quality of that expected on an undergraduate programme. Almost all students' achievement is excellent. The progress of a small number of relatively lower-attaining students is less rapid, but students of all social and ethnic backgrounds progress equally well.

136. Students engage in discussion at the very highest level. They work independently and conscientiously, shaping their ideas and opinions and debating between themselves, challenging each other to defend opposing points of view. Critical analysis of literary texts is excellent, showing subtlety and awareness of ambiguity and moral complexity. This was particularly obvious in a lesson on 'Othello', in which the group considered the character of Iago as seen through the eyes of other characters. An impassioned and eloquent discussion challenged the teacher's view. The debate allowed every member of the group to develop extended and complex notes for examination revision and for assignment writing. Without exception, the writing seen was sustained and sophisticated. The achievement of the most able students is excellent.

137. Students have an outstanding attitude to their work and so achievement in lessons is excellent. They are motivated to make best use of the time available. They know their learning targets and what they need to do to reach them. Students collaborate well in lessons and work hard in their own time to read and to research the social and historical contexts of literary texts and to develop their ideas and their notes. They show great dedication and commitment to producing critical writing of excellent skill and maturity.

138. The subject knowledge of the teachers is outstanding. The stimulation of students' discussion is of the very highest quality. Assessment is very effective. Students are told when their work is off-track and marking is careful and detailed, showing exactly what the girls need to do to improve. The excellent quality of the relationships between the teachers and the girls is the foundation for success in the subjects. Students have the trust and confidence to think out loud in the classroom, knowing that original ideas are highly valued. Lessons present high levels of challenge and to drive learning forward at a good pace. However, some plenary sessions are too long, which restricts collaborative and independent learning opportunities. The high challenge in the

lessons, although ideally matched to the most able students, leaves those who are not high fliers in need of more structured support. All students report that they enjoy their English and theatre studies lessons. They describe their teachers as enthusiastic and energetic. They appreciate being treated as independent learners and view the course as an excellent preparation for university study.

139. The leadership of the department is sustaining a centre of outstanding practice in English literature. Management of the sixth form provision is very good so that students find transition to Year 12 work smooth and supportive. Traditional resources for learning such as textbooks, flipcharts and whiteboards are readily available, but newer technologies, such as access to digital projection facilities to aid presentation or the Internet to support research, are not currently in use.

German

Provision in German is **very good**.

Main strengths

- Standards are well above average and students achieve very well.
- Students are well-motivated and contribute significantly to their own learning.
- Very good teaching stimulates the efforts of students to succeed.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Commentary

Year 13			
Standards	Well above average	Leadership	Very good
Achievement	Very good	Management	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Progress since the last inspection	Good

140. Examination results are consistently well above national averages. Evidence from work seen in lessons and Year 13 files shows that high standards are being maintained. Students speak German confidently. All convey their views and opinions effectively. Pronunciation and intonation are good, and in some cases very good. Since German is thoroughly established as the classroom language, students' listening skills are very well developed. The quality of students' oral and written work varies a little. The higher-attaining girls use complex language to express their own views and summarise others', while middle-attaining students take some time in Year 12 to adjust to the high standards required. Over the course of the year, writing skills develop very well.

141. Students' commitment and thorough preparation for lessons equips them with the tools and confidence to participate fully. They have good research and very good study skills, as evidenced by the high quality of their note-taking. They are partners in lessons, are not spoon-fed and show initiative. This contributes considerably to their progress. Classroom relationships are excellent.

142. Teachers' questioning and interventions are well judged and prompt students to extend and refine their thinking. Warm-up activities are carefully chosen to engage the girls' interest and concentration. Higher-order thinking skills are developed in and through German as students are challenged, for example, to identify rhetorical questions, examples of bias and exaggerations in textual analysis. Teachers effectively restructure texts to help students understand them better.

143. The course is well-balanced, with a good mix of topic and grammar work to develop all the required skills. Girls, however, do not have the benefit of a coherent programme of activities to enrich their linguistic and cultural experiences.

144. Girls are supported well in their learning. Year 12 students benefit from a help booklet which provides them with strategies to develop their skills and apportion their time. An appropriate selection of self-study materials is used to supplement the course. Assessment is good and students are clear what they have to do to improve. Their periodic progress reviews assist them well in this. They have ample practice from an early stage in examination-type questions and formal papers.

145. Leadership and management are very good. The department analyses examination performance closely to refine provision.

French and Latin

146. One double lesson in Year 13 was sampled in French. Teaching and learning were excellent and standards were very high. Students spoke with a rare degree of fluency and in a few cases pronunciation was of near native quality. In a Year 12 Latin lesson, teaching of the very small group was very good, with painstaking explanations of technicalities and good opportunities for girls to show their understanding through discussion.

Mathematics

Provision in mathematics is **excellent**.

Main strengths

- Standards at the end of Year 12 and Year 13 are outstanding, especially the proportion of girls gaining grades A or B.
- Teachers have excellent subject knowledge.
- Thorough and constructive assessment procedures ensure that all the girls achieve their best.
- The girls display a very high degree of motivation and are prepared to work very hard.
- The management of the department is excellent.

Commentary

Year 13			
Standards	Very high	Leadership	Very good
Achievement	Excellent	Management	Excellent
Teaching and learning	Very good	Progress since the last inspection	Very good

147. Students gain excellent results at AS and A-Level in mathematics and outstanding results in further mathematics. Standards over time are well above those seen nationally, with a very high proportion of the girls gaining A and B grades. The department sets itself challenging targets and often exceeds them. Achievement in lessons and over time is excellent because of expert, well-focused teaching and the very positive attitudes of the girls and their readiness to work hard.

148. Teaching and learning have some excellent features. In lessons judged excellent, teaching was meticulously planned and involved students very actively in their learning. This enabled students to develop sophisticated strategies which they could apply to new situations and promoted high standards of mathematical debate, hypothesis and generalisation. Excellent assessment procedures ensure that all the girls know how well they are doing and how to improve further. Teachers provide an excellent range of support through workshops and extra tuition time for any girl who needs help. Girls readily acknowledge the high level of individual support that they receive. The very positive relationships between the teachers and their students are an important factor in the girls' excellent achievement. The best teaching enthuses and inspires students, who are encouraged to read mathematics for pleasure, and to run lunchtime clubs and puzzle competitions for younger girls. Sixth form students are involved in a mentoring scheme, whereby they offer help to girls in Years 7 to 9.

149. Leadership of mathematics and further mathematics is very good and management is excellent. The teachers, who all have advanced subject knowledge, work closely together to ensure coherence in the teaching of a wide range of mathematics modules.

SCIENCE

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Girls' achievement is excellent; their results are very high.
- The attitude of students to their learning is exceptional.
- Accommodation and resources are very good.
- Teaching is very good overall, but with some inconsistencies.
- The department is very well managed and has a very good data base for tracking students' performance.

Commentary

Year 13			
Standards	Very high	Leadership	Very good
Achievement	Excellent	Management	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Progress since the last inspection	Very good

150. A-Level results in 2002 were very high and well above the average for girls. There has been a steady improvement in standards since 1998, and these high standards were maintained in 2003.

151. In Year 13, students are attentive and interested in the work covered. In a lesson to prepare ethanoic acid, they recalled previous work very well and related it meaningfully to the current task. They understood the principles behind the method and handled equipment confidently. In a Year 12 lesson, students asked penetrating questions about the electronic structure of atoms in order to explain trends in physical properties of elements.

152. In the very good lessons, the excellent subject knowledge of teachers enabled them to use question-and-answer techniques very effectively to check and promote learning. Relationships were very supportive and helped learning to be fun as well as informative. In a lesson demonstrating the chemical properties of elements, very good use was made of the observations to challenge students to explain some unexpected results. This helped students to be open-minded and investigative in their work. Occasionally, teachers did not involve the students enough and had not planned the lesson in sufficient detail. Student learning was better than the teaching in such lessons because they took the initiative by asking pertinent questions to promote their own understanding. Students are very positive about chemistry. They find it challenging and exciting. They are very well supported in their work and use the good library facilities to help them with their studies.

153. Courses are very well planned. A very good data base is kept so that students can be tracked and the work of the department evaluated to ensure that the highest standards are maintained. Teachers are monitored so that support can be given where necessary. The accommodation is very good, although one laboratory needs modernisation. The department is well resourced with both books and practical equipment. Standards have risen since the last inspection.

Physics

Provision in physics is **excellent**.

Main strengths

- Teaching is excellent.
- Students' achievement is very good.
- Students have excellent attitudes to their work.
- Students' learning is enhanced by very good accommodation and resources.
- Leadership and management of physics are excellent.

Commentary

Year 13			
Standards	Well above average	Leadership	Very good
Achievement	Very good	Management	Very good
Teaching and learning	Excellent	Progress since the last inspection	Good

154. Results in the A level examination in 2002 were well above the national average and well above the average for girls. Results have improved over the last three years. Students make very good progress from their advanced starting point and their achievement is excellent.

155. Students showed a high level of intellectual engagement through their discussions with teachers. In a Year 13 lesson on measuring astronomical distances, students were tenacious in their efforts to understand the concept of parallax when viewing close stars against a more distant background. In a Year 12 lesson, students were clearly extending their GCSE knowledge as they explained their understanding of the text they had read for homework on reflection and refraction. They expressed themselves clearly and asked pertinent questions when they needed to clarify a point.

156. Teachers interact exceptionally well with all students through the use of targeted questioning, checking learning and understanding. Opportunities were provided for a variety of discussions. Relationships are very good so that students share their understanding freely and supportively when solving problems. In a Year 12 lesson, one student checked her understanding of a problem with another more gifted student. She was clearly delighted when she had her reasoning confirmed and felt able to tackle the next step. Teachers had excellent subject knowledge and had high expectations for their students. In the Year 13 lesson on astronomical measurements, the teacher worked very effectively with the students to get them to relate to the huge distances in space and the implications for approximations in physical theory. The students checked every step along the way. One student said that she had heard of parsecs at a university master class but had not understood its meaning until this lesson.

157. Students are excited by physics and find it intellectually challenging. One student said she loved the logic of physics. They find their teachers stimulating and supportive. The library facilities are good with good access to ICT. In addition to text books, an interesting range of general books is available, such as 'A Brief History of Time'.

158. The physics team have done a close analysis of the syllabus and prepared an excellent scheme of linked work sheets, practicals, Power Point presentations and visual material on CDROMs. Each lesson had learning prompts for the students linked to the syllabus and a series of tests enables the students to identify their own areas of weakness. The team are thoughtful and aware of the need to cater for all students. The design of the course contributes to the high levels of achievement. The department has an extensive database to track students and analyse their success in different parts of the curriculum. The accommodation and resources, including provision for ICT are very good.

Biology

159. One lesson in biology was sampled. Students achieved very well in response to very good teaching when investigating transpiration in relation to plant tissues. They maintained a very good work rate and showed a very precise knowledge of technical terms.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and communication technology

160. In the lesson sampled, teaching and learning were very good. Careful explanations and demonstrations by the teacher and a high degree of individual assistance enabled students to achieve very well in a task concerned with creating a database.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students display excellent attitudes.
- Standards and results are very high.
- Girls develop very good research and analysis skills.
- Leadership, management and development planning are good.
- Some opportunities for using ICT are not taken.

Commentary

Year 13			
Standards	Very high	Leadership	Good
Achievement	Very good	Management	Good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Progress since the last inspection	Good

161. A-Level results are very high as were standards in work seen. Girls achieve very well. In the AS examination in 2003, standards were very high and most girls gained their predicted grades. Standards of work of current students significantly exceed national standards. In Year 13, most girls are reaching standards above predictions based on their GCSE results.

162. In all the lessons observed, teaching was very good and made considerable demands on students' previous knowledge, their powers of reasoning and their ability to analyse data. This resulted in very effective learning. In a lesson on hazard environments, students completed a risk assessment for the Philippines. The structure of the lesson and the range of activities clearly focused their learning and they applied previous knowledge, used data very effectively and developed a good understanding of the reasons for the vulnerability of certain areas of the Philippines. Similarly, in a lesson on human geography Year 12, students built on existing knowledge and developed a very good understanding of the advantages and disadvantages of rural life. Students recall knowledge very well, interpret and analyse data very well and are able to discuss sophisticated geographical concepts using appropriate subject-specific vocabulary. They apply this well both in full class discussion and very comprehensive written work.

163. Constant features in teaching were clear objectives, very good planning, a brisk pace, very good relationships and an imaginative range of methods and approaches. Teachers display very good subject knowledge in their exposition and questioning. They provide very good opportunities for girls to work independently and then to explain their findings to the rest of the group. Girls' excellent attitudes are a significant factor in the very good learning and achievement. They are co-operative and attentive and respond well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles they experience. They work well in small groups, support each other and listen well to each other's ideas. Most are confident in offering their ideas and confidently take responsibility for their own learning.

164. The courses are well planned. Attention is paid to ensuring that students understand and use the correct geographical terms. The use of ICT is still developing and some opportunities for its use are not taken.

165. The department demonstrates a clear commitment to continually improving standards and building on students' previous achievement. This is well illustrated by good work review procedures, involving discussion between students and teachers. Marking is generally rigorous but does not always identify specific targets for improvement. Appropriate opportunities are provided for students to produce work for in-depth assessment. Field work in Year 12 is very well organised and enables girls to extend their knowledge and understanding and to develop their considerable skills of analysis, based on data they have researched independently.

History

Provision in history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average and students achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are very good, with an effective balance between strong guidance and scope for independence.
- Very good individual guidance results from excellent marking.
- Students respond very well in lessons and express very positive opinions about the subject.
- A few lower-attaining Year 12 students are not monitored closely enough to help maintain their best pace of work .

Commentary

Year 13			
Standards	Well above average	Leadership	Good
Achievement	Very good	Management	Good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Progress since the last inspection	Good

166. The 2002 A-Level results were well above average, maintaining a consistent pattern over several years. Girls' current standards of work indicate very good achievement. Those students who join the course from other schools in Year 12 do very well. Girls generally achieved as well in history as in their other subjects. Results for 2003 show a slightly reduced proportion gaining the highest grades, but overall results remained similar to those of previous years. In lessons and work samples, Year 12 students show that they have made a very good start to the course. Year 13 students maintain well-above-average standards. In very well written essays, they made very astute references to historical sources when they lucidly explained how the role of the Third Estate developed during the French Revolution.

167. Teachers generally maintain an effective balance between giving clear guidance and providing scope for independent investigation. Carefully chosen tasks enable girls to improve historical knowledge and understanding while developing the skills required for success in examinations. Teaching has a clear focus on using historical sources to identify and analyse different interpretations of past events. For example, in a Year 12 lesson about the Russian Revolution, girls made very good use of a cartoon when considering attitudes to and representations of the Tsar. Marking is excellent, with detailed comments clearly indicating to girls what they have done well and how they can improve. Students are often encouraged to evaluate their own work. All students are generally very well involved in lessons, but sometimes a few comparatively lower-attaining students are not monitored closely enough to help maintain their best pace of work.

168. The response of students is very good, so that they benefit very well from the activities that are planned for them. They involve themselves well in tasks and show initiative and independence. A small number of Year 12 students have yet to develop these qualities fully. In a discussion, a group of Year 13 students voiced very positive opinions about the subject. They were particularly appreciative of the teachers' ability to make lessons interesting and enjoyable and of the effectiveness of the guidance teachers provide for individual students.

169. Good analysis of results and student reactions to courses has led to a change in syllabus that has made the A-Level course more popular. The school has minimised the impact of staff absence on students' progress.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

Main strengths

- Results in examinations are very high.
- Students' excellent attitudes contribute strongly to very good achievement.
- Teachers have very good subject knowledge and assessment procedures are very effective.
- The subject is very well managed and monitoring of teaching is effective.

Commentary

Year 13			
Standards	Well above average	Leadership	Good
Achievement	Very good	Management	Good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Progress since the last inspection	Not applicable

170. In 2001, AS results were very high, in the top five percent for all students and for girls. In the two subsequent years, they improved further. In 2001, A-Level results were very high compared with all students nationally, and well above the national average for girls. In 2002, the results were maintained. In 2003, results fell because of a problem with coursework, but they were still above average.

171. Standards observed in the school were well above average. At this stage in the year, evidence is thin because the biannual reviews have not taken place and coursework has not been started. However, the Year 12 students already showed very good evaluative skills and command of psychological vocabulary. The Year 13 students had very high AS results and had shown a pattern of sharp improvement in their core studies tests. On a new topic, they participated with excellent attitudes to the subject and were able to make insightful analytical comments, for example on the comparison of the theories of Cox and Seyle on 'stress'. Thus, for a group of students whose average GCSE scores ranged from A* to C, achievement over the course is very good.

172. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good. A strength of the teaching is the effective assessment, clearly and explicitly linked to the 20 core studies in AS and the essay questions in A-Level. Students valued the experimental component of AS and the greater depth of the A-Level topics. Excellent attitudes made a big contribution to students' learning. When Year 12 students conducted an experiment on short-term memory, they responded very well and showed great interest and evaluative ability. In Year 13, their active participation in seminar-style sessions allowed very effective learning.

173. A teacher new to the subject is being inducted effectively. The department is small so that informal methods allow good monitoring of teaching and learning to take place. The curriculum is good, well tailored to examination requirements. Teaching methods suit most pupils well and they are meeting their targets, but a handful of relatively lower-attaining students do less well and require an adjustment in teaching method to give them more support towards achieving theirs. The use of ICT in the subject is an area for further development, for example to include the development of a psychology website. Psychology was not mentioned in the previous report, but has developed substantially since that time in numbers and resources, and overall improvement is good.

Religious education

174. In the lesson sampled, Year 12 students discussed in impressive depth aspects of science and religion. The excellent teaching drew on a wide range of sources and stimulated the interest of students in the attitudes of Christians and atheists to miracles. Religious education is taught as part of general studies and through occasional organised events.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Graphics

175. One lesson was sampled in AS level graphics. In a very good Year 12 lesson, students worked enthusiastically and confidently to develop their skills in the use of colour. Careful attention to detail resulted in standards that were well above course expectations.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design

Provision in art and design is **excellent**.

Main strengths

- Students attain very high standards in fine art and their achievement in personal study projects is outstanding.
- Teaching, learning and individual support for students are very good.
- Students' display excellent attitudes to study and are accomplished independent learners.
- Leadership and management provide a clear vision for the subject and reflect students' ambitions.

Commentary

Year 13			
Standards	Well above average	Leadership	Very good
Achievement	Very good	Management	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Progress since the last inspection	Very good

176. The overall standard of work in art is well above average. Results at A-Level have been consistently very high, with all students achieving A and B grades in the past two years. AS and A2 results in fine art were well above average in 2001 and results for 2002 and 2003 were higher. Results were very high compared with those in other maintained schools and well above average for girls nationally. Achievement overall is very good. The attainment and achievement of students of different ethnic backgrounds are similarly high.

177. Predicted grades for 2004 reflect a similar high level of attainment to previous years. In Year 12, students taking AS art sustain much of their interest from their GCSE work, drawing and painting from direct observation and developing their colour skills through mixed media in a structured and systematic way. Achievement is very good and students significantly enhance their own skills in the use of a wide range of media from studying artists' techniques. In Year 13, students show a sophisticated understanding of the formal elements in purposeful preparatory studies and development of ideas. The majority achieve a highly developed understanding of technical knowledge and art language through drawing and painting. Sketchbooks are very well used to stimulate the creative process. Students with slightly weaker drawing skills achieve well-above-average results because of very good teaching and their own dedication to study. The use of mixed media and good quality artists' reference materials is helping to improve their colour techniques. Excellent use is made of the Internet for personal study. Students' research and presentation of personal studies indicates a high level of ICT competence.

178. Teachers' expectations are very high and relationships are excellent, both of which help to stimulate and motivate students. Teachers have very good expertise and show a high level of commitment in preparing students for examinations. They plan activities geared to individual students, encouraging them to learn independently, which is of particular benefit where both years are taught together. However, while the use of time is well planned, students working separately from the target group have less opportunity to engage in dialogue with the teacher. Marking and assessment are very good. A strong feature of an excellent lesson seen was the teacher's challenging questioning that extended students' thinking skills. Students were able to share their analyses and evaluations of artists' work. This sharpened their perceptions and analyses and enhanced presentation in their own studies.

179. The leadership of the department provides clear vision and direction and an excellent role model. Monitoring and evaluation of the department's performance are very good. Standards and the numbers taking A-Level have risen since the last inspection, and improvement since then has been good. Sixth form art accommodation is limited to sharing mainstream classrooms. This has a minor detrimental effect on the quality of students' work and the freedom to develop in-depth study. The range and quality of painting materials to raise achievement at the B grades at A-Level are limited. Library provision effectively enhances the critical and contextual aspects of art, though multicultural art reference texts are limited. Attractive displays of sixth form art in classrooms and around the school are raising awareness of the high standards achieved.

Music

Provision for music is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in A-Level music have been very high in recent years.
- Teaching and pupils' achievement are excellent.
- Pupils are highly motivated and show strong commitment both to the course and to other music activities.
- The department is very well organised and managed and courses are organised in conjunction with the neighbouring boys' school.
- There is no access to ICT in the department.

Commentary

Year 13			
Standards	Very high	Leadership	Excellent
Achievement	Excellent	Management	Excellent
Teaching and learning	Excellent	Progress since the last inspection	Excellent

180. The attainment of girls currently in the sixth form is very high. Small numbers of girls have taken music over the past few years. However, numbers have increased considerably this year. Results in 2002 A-Level were well above the national average. All candidates in 2003 gained A grades.

181. Girls enter the sixth form as accomplished musicians and their achievement is excellent from these advanced starting points. They have comprehensive knowledge and understanding of a wide range of music. They discriminate between composers' styles, for example in lieder by Schubert and Schumann, and confidently appraise each other's work or the music of the composers they study. Theoretical understanding is excellent. Pupils have technical security and confidence as performers. In composing, girls attain very high standards in class and instrumental lessons.

182. Teaching is characterised by very extensive subject knowledge and working with pupils at a very advanced level. Girls' achievements are very high because they work with a high degree of commitment in response to excellent teaching. Time is used very efficiently. The individual support that the teacher gives is carefully targeted and of high technical quality. Girls are thoroughly familiar with the requirements of the examination. The relationship between teachers and girls is excellent.

183. Girls' work benefits from the important position of music in their individual creative, intellectual and recreational lives. They organize their own ensemble groups and make a valuable contribution to extra-curricular activities. Standards in ensembles, such as the chamber choir, are very high. Most girls take part in high profile musical events in the City of Birmingham, including the CBSO Choir.

184. The joint provision arrangements with the boys' school work very successfully, and the students enjoy the experience of studying in both schools. The department has maintained the high level of success noted at the time of the last inspection.

Theatre studies

185. Two lessons were sampled in theatre studies. Results in theatre studies are very high and provision is excellent. Teaching is outstanding. Standards are excellent in practical work and in critical evaluation of performance and improvisation. The practical sessions held in the drama studio represent excellent practice.

Example of outstanding practice

In a Year 12 theatre studies lesson, the teacher generates curiosity and interest through the use of carefully selected items, which only later do students recognise as a powerful introduction to 'method' acting.

As the students enter the drama studio they see unusual objects that have been set out in the centre of the working space. They are asked to explore the object in a tactile way and to explain their feelings and responses to a partner. The students are intrigued and in reporting back to the class they share memories and situations from their childhood that have been triggered by the objects. Exceptional trust and confidence between the students, and between the students and the teacher, ensure that contributions are open, honest and mature. The teacher uses questions expertly to range across disciplines: "What would a psychological analysis of that response suggest? What did Freud have to say about childhood experience and adult behaviour? Is this similar to a stream of consciousness approach to the novel?..." The class then quickly moves into short, sharp series of practical activity which involves building the objects into improvisation. It is only later revealed that the lesson is an introduction to Stanislavski and the method approach, and by the time that is revealed the students have already experienced the power of the 'method' approach for themselves.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

No subjects are taught in this area.

BUSINESS

Economics and business studies

Provision in economics and business studies is **very good**.

Main strengths

- Results at AS and A-Level are consistently well above average.
- Teaching is very good and provides a high level of challenge and support provided for students.
- Relationships are excellent and discussions are of a very high standard.
- Students display excellent attitudes and their commitment to success contributes to their very good achievement.

Commentary

Year 13			
Standards	Well above average	Leadership	Very good
Achievement	Very good	Management	Very good
Teaching and learning	Very good	Progress since the last inspection	Good

186. Recent results at both AS level and A-Level have been consistently above the national averages. Students achieve very well. Pass rates have each year been at or just below 100 per cent with the proportion of grades A and B being well above national levels. The only recent inconsistencies in the levels of grades achieved have been during absences of the school's specialist teachers.

187. These very high standards of attainment were reflected in the quality of work seen during the inspection. Students are confident and enthusiastic in their acquisition and utilisation of economic and business terminology and concepts. Their skills of analysis and evaluation are impressive. This was seen, for example, in Year 13 lessons examining strategic plans of businesses. Notes taken during lessons, supported by very well selected and prepared source materials, are always commendably thorough and accurate. Essays and coursework are structured and written with balanced and convincing information and judgements. Real economy situations are appropriately considered, as seen in a Year 12 lesson looking at motivation. Progression from AS to A2 extends subject knowledge and competence very effectively.

188. All teaching observed was very good, displaying commitment and a detailed command of the subject on all topics. Teaching strategies enable students to enjoy a climate of dialogue and shared learning, within both economics and business studies elements. This is supported by an emphasis upon the assessment criteria used in examinations and the refining of study techniques. Students are made constantly aware of what they need to do to achieve success, and they value this focus. The excellent motivation and commitment of the students is matched by the skills and dedication of the teachers.

189. Students follow a modular economics and business studies course. There are three modules at both AS and A-Level. The structure includes evidence and extended writing questions, portfolio pieces and pre-issued evidence. The course chosen provides significant opportunities to challenge and to stretch able students. Resources are up-to-date, meeting the demands of the varied issues and developments. Access to and use of ICT are limited, though applied to advantage in specific areas of learning, such as profit and loss accounts.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

No course are taught in this area.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

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