

INSPECTION REPORT

ST HILDA'S CHURCH OF ENGLAND HIGH SCHOOL

Sefton Park

LEA area: Liverpool

Unique reference number: 104721

Headteacher: Mr J C Yates

Lead inspector: Mr T Wheatley

Dates of inspection: 10th – 13th November 2003

Inspection number: 261421

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Voluntary Aided
Age range:	11 – 18
Gender:	Female
Number on roll:	865
School address:	Croxteth Drive Sefton Park Liverpool
Postcode:	L17 3AL
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Appropriate authority:	Governing Body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Joan Stein
Date of previous inspection:	14 th September 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

The school is a single sex, voluntary aided school for girls with 865 pupils and students on roll, of whom 183 are in the sixth form. It is broadly average in size and has increased its numbers since the last inspection. The sixth form is also average in size and has increased in size since the last inspection. There is a small number of boys in the sixth form. The percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals is below average, though some girls come from families where there are socio-economic difficulties. Girls are predominantly from practising Church of England families. There are small numbers of pupils from African, Chinese, Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi and other Asian backgrounds. Together they constitute a significant small proportion of the pupils in the school. A very small number of these pupils are in the early stages of English language acquisition. The proportion of pupils on the school's register for special educational needs is very low and one pupil, which is a very low proportion, has a statement of special educational needs.

Attainment on entry to the school is above average, with the proportion of girls who have obtained the higher levels in the end of Year 6 national tests taken in primary schools being well above average.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
10013	Ted Wheatley	Lead inspector	
19720	Deborah Granville Hastings	Lay inspector	
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2919	Phil Armitage	Team inspector	Mathematics
27503	Marie Foulds	Team inspector	Science
30901	Sue Schofield	Team inspector	Art and design; Citizenship; Personal, social and health education
7084	Jack Haslam	Team inspector	Design and technology
12118	Allan Paver	Team inspector	Geography
19152	Richard Merryfield	Team inspector	History
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2626	Marion Thompson	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
1340	David Wigley	Team inspector	Music
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is an effective school in which girls achieve well and frequently very well. Standards are above average and girls perform well in public examinations. Many girls perform very well. The headteacher and senior staff provide a clear direction for the school's improvement. Teaching is good overall and often very good or occasionally excellent. Girls have very positive attitudes to school and their approach to work is very mature. The school gives good value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Girls achieve well and many achieve very well.
- Girls' attitudes and behaviour and the quality of their personal development are very good.
- Teaching is good and in many lessons it is very good or sometimes excellent.
- Provision for pupils with special educational needs is unsatisfactory.
- The school is well led and managed.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory although the school manages what it has well.
- The school does not use test and examination information as effectively as it could to analyse the girls' performance.
- Provision for information and communication technology (ICT) across the curriculum is unsatisfactory.
- Reports to parents on girls' progress do not consistently provide enough information.

The school has made satisfactory progress since it was last inspected in September 1998. High standards have been maintained. Teaching has improved, particularly in relation to marking work and in challenging the most able girls. Opportunities for discussion and development between senior management and middle management have improved. There has been satisfactory improvement in the teaching of ICT as a separate subject, but unsatisfactory improvement in the cross-curricular provision of ICT. There has been satisfactory improvement in using assessment information, but there is still some way to go, particularly in using national comparative information in the analysis of results. Reports to parents from teachers have not improved enough.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Achievement is good. Standards are above average by Year 9 and girls' attainment in end of Year 9 national tests has been maintained at well above average over recent years. On entry to the school attainment is above average overall, therefore girls have achieved well by the end of Year 9. By Year 11 standards are also above average overall. In English and science standards are well above average and in mathematics they are above average. In history, modern foreign languages and music, standards are well above average and elsewhere they are above average. In the GCSE examinations in 2003 attainment was well above average and, although slightly lower than in 2002, attainment levels have been maintained over recent years. Achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good overall and in English it is very good. Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds perform as well as other pupils. Pupils who have special educational needs do not achieve quite as well as other pupils,

though overall their achievement is satisfactory. Higher attainers achieve well overall and very well in Years 7 to 9.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education is good overall. Teaching is **good** and learning is **very good**, because girls have such positive attitudes to the work they do. The curriculum is satisfactory and the provision for extra-curricular activities is good. There is a high level of participation by girls, especially in sports, drama and other activities. Provision of extra-curricular music activities is satisfactory overall. The quality of advice and support for girls is good, and girls receive effective guidance on further study and career opportunities.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are good. The headteacher provides clear leadership and he is well supported by senior staff and those in management positions. The school has a focus on raising standards and it is generally effective in this, although it does not use the national assessment analysis information well enough to make its own analysis of examination results more useful in guiding further improvements. The school is well run. Accommodation, while unsatisfactory, is improving with the addition of a drama studio and improved library facilities. The governors have a satisfactory understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses and they are effectively involved in planning improvements and working with the school on its development.

PARENTS' AND GIRLS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Girls' and parents' views of the school are good. The majority of parents are pleased with the provision the school makes for their daughters and most feel that it addresses problems that arise well. Overall, girls are happy with how the school responds to their concerns, mainly because relationships with teachers are very good. However, there is no school council for girls to take their concerns to, and girls recognise this.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

The **most important things** the school needs to do are:

- Improve provision for pupils with special educational needs, particularly in Years 10 and 11.
- Work with the local education authority to further improve accommodation.
- Use national comparative assessment information to analyse girls' performance effectively so that the school can focus more clearly on individuals and groups of girls to help them perform better.
- Improve provision for ICT across the curriculum.
- Ensure that reports to parents on girls' progress consistently comment on what girls know, understand and can do and what they need to do to improve.

THE SIXTH FORM AT ST HILDA'S HIGH SCHOOL, LIVERPOOL

OVERALL EVALUATION

This is a very effective sixth form, and it is cost effective. The school loses a few Year 11 girls to other sixth forms in the area, but this year it has taken a similar number from other schools, including male students. Teaching and learning are overall very good. Students achieve well and work at standards above the national average. In the last published examination analysis, students gained results above average. In the most recent results, standards improved. Retention rates into the sixth form are high, and they are very good between Year 12 and Year 13.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- A broad and balanced curriculum is offered.
- The sixth form is led and managed very well.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students have excellent attitudes.
- The accommodation is inadequate.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

Mathematics	Good. Teaching and learning are good, with teachers having a good grasp of the subject, and with students making good intellectual effort.
Biology	Good. Teaching and learning are very good, with teachers having command of, and enthusiasm for, their subject. Students make good progress and achieve above average standards.
Business/Accounting	Good. Teachers use questioning techniques well and regularly and effectively monitor students' progress. This leads to students gaining a secure knowledge of business practice. Standards of current students are above average.
Information and communication technology	Good. An AVCE course is taught, which is appropriate for these students. Teaching is good, and the excellent attitudes of students, together with the high quality expertise of the teachers, lead to students achieving well.
Physical education	Good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, and have very good relationships with students. This contributes positively to students achieving well and gaining standards overall above average.
History	Very good. Teachers foster problem-solving techniques and encourage much discussion, which helps students to develop enquiring minds. The department is led and managed very well.
French	Excellent. Teaching and learning are excellent and students respond well to a high level of challenge. Students make very good progress and achieve well above average standards.
Psychology	Very good. Teaching and learning are overall very good. Students have very good attitudes, and achieve well.
English literature	Good. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are planned very well. They are developed at a fast pace, are challenging, and totally engage the students. Students achieve well and gain average standards.
Art, and Music	One music lesson was observed in which teaching and learning were good , and the one Year 13 student gained good standards. An overall

satisfactory Year 13 art lesson was observed.

Design and technology, and
Food technology

One textiles lesson was observed in which teaching and learning were **good** and students achieved average standards. A food technology lesson was observed, in which teaching and learning were **good**, and students achieved average standards.

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

Overall, advice, guidance and support for students are good. Students are well prepared for entry into the sixth form. Tutors have close relationships with students, involve them in individual target setting, mentor them effectively and evaluate their progress twice a year. Tutor periods are used productively, for example developing students' study skills. Careers advice and opportunities for independent research through the careers office are good, and the organisation of individual interviews with the Connexions adviser is managed very well by the head of sixth form.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form is led and managed very well. Numbers entering the sixth form have steadily risen since the head of sixth form took over. Links with another sixth form have been established in order to broaden curriculum opportunities, and more are planned for next year. The head of sixth form manages the ten tutors who effectively oversee the progress of students well. Students have considerable respect for the head of sixth form.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are very happy with their sixth form, and almost all enjoy being a member very much. Students confirm that the sixth form is run well, and that teachers are very able and that they are accessible and helpful when they ask for support. Students feel confident in approaching any teachers with academic problems. In the questionnaire, students stated that they did not receive enough information about sixth form courses while in Year 11. All students spoken to stated that they had ample information, and had access to further information if they needed it. Students believe that their views are considered, and that if suggestions are rejected, good reasons are given. Although there is not a huge take-up of extra-curricular opportunities in the sixth form, due largely to a heavy workload in each year, there is a large range of opportunity.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY GIRLS

Standards achieved in areas of learning, subjects and courses

Achievement is **very good** in Years 7 to 9 and **good** in Years 10 and 11. Girls with special educational needs show satisfactory achievement. Standards are above average and for many girls are well above average. Many girls achieve very well. Students in the sixth form achieve well and standards are above average.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Girls achieve well overall.
- Standards are highest in English, science, history, modern foreign languages and music.
- Girls with special educational needs do not achieve as well as they ought to.

Commentary

1. On entry to the school, girls' attainment is above average and for some girls it is well above average.
2. In the end of Year 9 national tests taken in 2003, attainment of girls is well above the national average in English, mathematics and science and continues the pattern of recent years. Compared with schools where pupils have similar levels of prior attainment, performance in the end of Year 9 tests in 2003 was also well above average. Overall, girls have maintained their high levels of attainment on entry to the school, and some have improved on their attainment on entry. The school exceeded its targets for English, science and mathematics and equalled those for ICT.
3. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, the percentage of girls obtaining five or more A*-C grades was well above average, as was the percentage obtaining five or more A*-G grades. Compared with schools where girls had a similar performance in end of Year 9 national tests in 2001, results were average for those girls obtaining five or more A*-C grades and well above average for those obtaining one or more A*-G grade. The school met its targets.
4. Inspection evidence shows that by Year 9 standards are above average overall. Standards are well above average in English, science, design and technology and geography. They are above average in mathematics, art and design, history, modern foreign languages and music. Standards are average in ICT. They are below average in physical education, because swimming skills, in particular, are underdeveloped. Overall, girls achieve well and many achieve very well, reaching standards that are well above average in many subjects. Achievement is not only a function of good teaching but also of the very good attitudes girls have to their work.
5. By Year 11 standards are still above average, and for many girls they are well above average. In English, science, history, modern foreign languages and music, standards are well above average. In mathematics, art and design, design and technology and geography, they are above average and in ICT and physical education they are broadly average. Girls achieve well and frequently very well. Many show that they have sustained their efforts and positive attitudes over several years.
6. Generally, higher attaining girls achieve well or very well, though in geography some higher attainers do not. Girls from different ethnic minorities achieve as well as other girls. The progress made by girls with special educational needs is satisfactory overall, but this is not as good as the progress made by other girls. This is because there is limited specialist support. While girls with special educational needs make satisfactory progress In Years 10 and 11, this

is because groups are small and teachers are sensitive to girls' needs. Records of the progress made by girls with special educational needs are not kept.

7. Standards of literacy are generally above average. They are well above average in English, drama and science and average in mathematics and music. They are good in other subjects. Where standards are above average, girls have a secure knowledge and understanding of technical vocabulary and demonstrate this in their well-structured, accurate writing. Girls speak well and can argue and debate issues with a degree of sophistication because they listen well and demonstrate respect for the contribution of others.
8. The standards of girls' numeracy skills are above average. In most subjects, standards of work involving the use of statistics and graphs are good. The physical education department, for example, makes good use of numeracy when it applies Newton's laws of motion to its study of sprinting.
9. The standards of girls' ICT skills are broadly average. They are no higher because there are difficulties of access to ICT facilities. However, in some subjects skills are above average. They are above average in geography where girls make sophisticated use of spreadsheets, logging data and displaying their findings in graph form, and in history where they use the Internet for research. They are also above average in modern foreign languages and English. Elsewhere, the use of ICT to support girls' learning is underdeveloped.

Sixth form

10. In 2001, GCE A/AS results were well above the national average. There were fewer A and B grades in 2002, but these increased in the 2003 examinations. The small number of male students, who have come from neighbouring schools, generally perform at below average levels. Inspection evidence shows that standards overall are **above the national average**. Standards are well above the national average in French, and above average in English, mathematics, biology, history and psychology. They are average in business and accounting, ICT, and physical education. Overall, students achieve well.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	98 (93)	68 (66)
Mathematics	93 (91)	70 (67)
Science	93 (91)	68 (66)

There were 137 girls in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

Standards in GCSE/GNVQ examinations at the end of Year 11 in 2003

	School results	National results
Percentage of girls gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	76.1 (78.4)	52.6 (50.0)
Percentage of girls gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	98.5 (100.0)	88.6 (91.0)
Percentage of girls gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100.0)	94.6 (96.0)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	49.8 (52.1)	N/A (39.8)

There were 134 girls in the year group. The percentages include the equivalent GCSE grades obtained in GNVQ assessments. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

Standards in GCE A/AS-level and VCE examinations at the end of Year 13 in 2002

	School results	National results
Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	100 (100.0)	86 (N/A)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	41.8 (32.5)	33.6 (N/A)
Average point score per student	6.3 (6.0)	34.8 (17.3)

There were 80 girls in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

Girls' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Relationships and girls' personal development and attitudes to learning are very good. The basic Christian mission of the school permeates most of its life and activities. Girls' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Behaviour, attitudes, attendance and punctuality are very good, and excellent in the sixth form.
- There are good relationships and co-operative learning in lessons, in clubs and in extra-curricular activities.
- The school's provision for girls' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good overall and has improved, but could be improved even more by better co-ordination, monitoring and evaluation.
- Provision for multicultural education has not improved enough since the last inspection.

Commentary

11. The school has a clear code of conduct and high expectations and the girls respond well to them. The strength of relationships across the school and an emphasis on self-discipline contribute to effective learning. Behaviour in lessons and around the school is very good. Occasional breaches of discipline or poor attendance are well dealt with by a combination of high expectations, self-discipline, good pastoral care, parental co-operation and successful liaison with the educational welfare officer. Exclusions were low in the reporting period. There were 12 exclusions relating to 10 girls, all but one of whom were white. The attendance, behaviour, attitudes, punctuality and relationships in the sixth form are excellent.
12. The level of attendance is very high in comparison with other schools and the rate of unauthorised absence is below the national median. The school has the third highest attendance figures in the city. The school figure for 2002/3 was 95.1 per cent against the national figure of 91 per cent. Authorised absence was 4.7 per cent against the national figure of 7.8 per cent. Unauthorised absence was 0.2 per cent against the national figure of 1.2 per cent. The school has a comprehensive monitoring system and can rely on the support of the great majority of parents.
13. Overall, the provision for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the girls is very good, with strengths in the provision for moral and social development.
14. Spiritual provision is good, meets statutory requirements and has improved since the last inspection. The Christian ethos of the school permeates all its life and activities and provides a good basis for collective worship and spiritual insights in assemblies, Eucharistic services, registration groups and several curriculum subjects, although religious education (subject to a separate diocesan inspection) does not play its expected role. The school has improved the spiritual provision by having in-service training and asking departments to make an audit of

their contributions but it does not have fully developed mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its provision. There is a spiritual element in the very good relationships, the sensitive handling of occasions such as Remembrance Day and the celebration of the achievement gained in sporting activities and artistic or musical self-expression.

15. Provision for the girls' moral development is very good. The school has a clear code of conduct and a behaviour policy, which the vast majority of girls observe. The school has very good mechanisms to cope with any instances of poor behaviour and a very good system of pastoral care. Opportunities to raise moral issues and moral choices occur throughout the curriculum. Moral and social concerns are evident in the large number of charitable causes supported by the school.
16. Provision for the social development of the girls is very good. There is much evidence of co-operative learning in lessons, in clubs and in extra-curricular activities. Girls work very well in groups, especially in geography. A large number of visits are made, some of them residential, some of them abroad. These not only help in the socialisation of girls but also help to ease the transition of girls into the secondary school. There are opportunities for girls to take on some responsibilities in the main school and in the sixth form council where they can have an impact on school policies and learn about citizenship. However, there is no school council for pupils age 11 to 16. There are good opportunities in several subjects, including personal, social and health education, to learn about society, social and moral issues, and citizenship. Projects in collaboration with the police force reinforce these benefits. There is a good guidance programme including that concerned with careers advice and work placements. The school has a lot of participation in sport and girls achieve sporting success at local, national and, occasionally, international level in athletics.
17. The provision for the cultural development of the girls is good but has not improved much since the last inspection in respect of the co-ordination of the multicultural provision. The school tends to assume with some justification that a church school will do the right thing and form the right attitudes. The school itself does not provide a very wide multicultural mix but opportunities exist in the curriculum to study other cultures, religions and races and to promote appropriate attitudes. Opportunities arise in art and drama and music to study other cultures but the study of other major faiths in religious education is under-emphasised. There are valuable extra-curricular visits to galleries, museums and outdoor pursuits centres.

Sixth form

18. Within the very good provision of the whole school, the attendance, behaviour, attitudes, punctuality and relationships in the sixth form are excellent. The opportunities for spiritual insights and reflection are good. A telling example of this is the topic on the Holocaust in history, which also entails a visit to the Holocaust Museum in Nottingham and an interview with a survivor. The style of teaching in history and other subjects enables students to explore and express their own feelings and to respect those of others.
19. The provision for the moral development of students in the sixth form is very good. There are opportunities to take on responsibilities in the sixth form council and as prefects and charity fundraisers. Geography and biology field trips raise questions of concern for the environment. Students respond very well to the school's expectation that they be independent and self-disciplined. They also volunteer for service in the community such as acting as helpers at wheelchair sports days.
20. The provision for social development in the sixth form is very good. Students work very well together in groups. The head girl, deputies and senior prefects are elected and students play a part in the sixth form council. Two good examples of their civic and social development are the Heartstone project on racism, refugees and asylum seekers, undertaken in conjunction with the police liaison officer, and the UN debates with other schools in the Town Hall.

21. The provision for cultural development in the sixth form is good. Students respond very well to opportunities to extend their own cultural awareness in subjects such as art, music, history and, to a lesser extent, their understanding and appreciation of multicultural issues.
22. Students have **excellent** attitudes. All students take highly responsible attitudes to their studies, and are developing very good independent learning skills. They actively participate in lessons, are always positive, and demonstrate a strong urge to succeed. The attitude of students contributes strongly to the good achievement made across each year of the sixth form.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	4.7	School data	0.2
National data	7.8	National data	1.2

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

Ethnic background of girls

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	No of girls on roll	Number of fixed period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – British	775	11	0
White – any other White background	19	0	0
Mixed – White and Black Caribbean	2	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Indian	5	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Pakistani	7	0	0
Asian or Asian British – Bangladeshi	4	0	0
Asian or Asian British – any other Asian background	1	0	0
Black or Black British – African	10	1	0
Black or Black British – any other Black background	20	0	0
Chinese	10	0	0
Any other ethnic group	11	0	0
No ethnic group recorded	1	0	0

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

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are **good**. In particular, teachers' subject knowledge has a significant impact on how well girls learn, and the relationships between teachers and girls ensure that a friendly, challenging atmosphere for learning engages girls in effective learning.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are good overall.
- Girls have a high level of motivation and work hard.
- Relationships between teachers and girls are very good and result in good discipline and a positive attitude to learning.

Commentary

23. Teaching and learning are good overall. In Years 7 to 11, about a quarter of the teaching is very good or, occasionally, excellent. In total, about four fifths of the teaching in Years 7 to 11 is good or better and just under one fifth is satisfactory. A very small amount of teaching is unsatisfactory. A lot of work has been done to improve teaching and this is having a positive impact on how well girls achieve. Teachers' subject knowledge is very good and they use it well in discussion, preparing worksheets and planning a range of interesting and challenging activities. As a consequence, girls are enthusiastic about lessons, make a real effort and frequently produce standards of work that indicate an interest and commitment beyond what teachers expect. It is to the teachers' credit that they sustain these attitudes so that interest and enthusiasm continue throughout the girls' stay in school. Nevertheless, at times teachers take girls' co-operation and effort for granted, and do not push them enough.

24. The best teaching stretches girls considerably. In particular, girls are very challenged in modern foreign languages and they rise to this, producing extremely good examination results. Modern foreign languages teachers have an excellent understanding of the potential of these girls because they use a wide range of assessment information, including national comparative data, which they analyse and use to plan work accordingly.
25. The very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching is mainly associated with lack of subject expertise in teaching aspects of design and technology.
26. The teaching of literacy is good overall. It is very good in English where it is supported by textbook resources. Opportunities for speaking and listening are built into planning. Teachers have high expectations of girls, and written work is generally well presented. Girls also have many opportunities to practise extended writing in a variety of styles. However, there are inconsistencies, with too few opportunities to extend oral skills or writing in mathematics and missed opportunities in music to develop the use of key vocabulary.
27. The teaching of numeracy in most subjects is good. It is integrated into many schemes of work and into lesson plans, and plays a significant role in girls' learning. A wide range of graphical, statistical and computational tasks is included that challenges girls and helps them develop their numeracy skills.
28. The teaching of skills in ICT is satisfactory overall – an improvement since the last inspection. The main difficulty is due to difficulties of access to the ICT suites and the lack of resources within departments. Nevertheless, good work was seen in geography, where girls made sophisticated use of spreadsheets, logging data about the size of stones in a river bed and displaying their findings in graph form. Effective use was also seen in history, using the Internet for research about monarchs and Robert Owen, a factory owner and social reformer. With the exception of modern foreign languages and English, the use of ICT to support girls' learning across the curriculum is underdeveloped.
29. Procedures for assessing and monitoring girls' progress are satisfactory. The school has a great deal of assessment information about its girls. However, limited and inconsistent use is made of national performance data to compare the performance of girls against national averages and to set targets and identify under-achievement.
30. Girls' progress is tracked effectively through a termly review, with contributions from subject teachers. Assessment within departments is regular, thorough and constructive and helps girls improve the quality of their work. It is slightly better in Years 9 to 11 as teachers have good knowledge of examination requirements and measure girls' work against them. In science, English and modern foreign languages, where assessment is good, feedback is particularly effective in helping girls evaluate their own work, correct their mistakes and set short-term targets for improvement. Elsewhere assessment is satisfactory, although further development is required in ICT. Across the school, marking is supportive and encouraging, but occasionally does not provide sufficient guidance to girls on how to improve. In physical education, marking and assessment, whilst satisfactory, are insufficiently linked to the National Curriculum or GCSE courses.
31. The school has access to a rich variety of assessment information which is used retrospectively to inform whole-school and departmental planning. It is not used consistently to provide girls with a realistic view of their performance, to identify under-achievement or to inform targets for improvement.
32. The teaching of girls with special educational needs is satisfactory overall and often good, particularly in Years 10 and 11 where teachers have a sensitive approach to meeting individual needs. Where teaching is good, the teacher provides investigative learning opportunities based on girls' direct experience, has high expectations of their behaviour and provides many opportunities for them to report back their findings. However, lack of enough specialist support

means that girls do not always receive the help they need and do not make the progress they are capable of.

Sixth form

33. Teaching and learning are **very good** overall. The very good teaching, together with the excellent attitudes of the students, contributes towards very good learning. Teachers have expert subject knowledge, and this is recognised and respected by the students. Teachers have high expectations and extend high levels of challenge. A good range of teaching techniques is used which ensures that students think for themselves and develop their own ideas. In all lessons there is a fast pace of development, enabling students to quickly assimilate much information. Physical education teachers, in particular, have a highly effective working relationship with students, which contributes towards their achievement. Teachers in the history department notably encourage students to become very active learners. Excellent teaching in the French department totally motivates and engages students.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 162 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
4 (2%)	43 (27%)	88 (54%)	25 (15%)	2 (1%)	0	0

The table gives the number of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

The curriculum

Curriculum provision is **satisfactory** overall and **good** in the sixth form. Modern foreign languages provision is good and the opportunities for enrichment are generally good. Provision for girls with special educational needs is unsatisfactory, while provision for the highest attainers is good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school makes unusually rich provision for modern foreign languages and offers a very wide range of science subjects at GCSE.
- The sixth form curriculum is good and good collaboration with other schools widens the choice of subjects available.
- The school offers a very rich, generous and varied programme of trips, visits and learning experiences.
- Provision for special educational needs is unsatisfactory.
- The provision of extra-curricular music, particularly instrumental work, is underdeveloped.
- The accommodation for learning is unsatisfactory.
- Some sixth form classes are very big, creating heavy loads of marking and support.

Commentary

34. The curriculum is broad and balanced and generally meets the needs of the girls. The school day is longer than that recommended and teachers and girls make good use of the additional time. The planned reorganisation of the school day to match the timetables of schools collaborating at sixth form level should adjust some minor imbalances of time allocation. The school makes unusually full provision for modern foreign languages at all stages and the range of sciences offered at GCSE is particularly wide. The provision for girls following a 14 to 19 programme is good.
35. Opportunities for enrichment of the curriculum are good overall. The school offers a very good, generous and varied programme of additional learning activities, trips and visits which enrich

learning experiences. Participation in sport is good and the school supports very well its very able sportswomen, properly adjusting the curriculum where necessary to assist training. Participation in the arts is satisfactory overall. Provision for choral music is very good, but instrumental music is underdeveloped. There is good provision to support standards in individual subjects outside the school day.

36. Equality of access to the curriculum is satisfactory overall. Gifted and talented girls are well supported and the 'Aim Higher' funds support three-quarters of girls at GCSE. The proportion of girls gaining the highest levels in end of Year 9 national tests has more than doubled and the proportion gaining A* and A grades at GCSE has also increased.
37. Provision for girls with special educational needs is unsatisfactory overall, even though the progress of most girls catered for is satisfactory. The school makes no formal provision to support the curriculum in Years 10 and 11 for the lowest attainers and there is insufficient support in Years 7 to 9 to help girls with specific learning difficulties. While lessons are planned to meet the needs of the majority of girls, the needs of those with special educational needs are not adequately met. For example, writing exercises that are suitable for other girls are not always suited to developing girls with special educational needs' understanding or appreciation of poetry.
38. Provision for personal and social education is good and girls are well prepared for the next stage of their education.
39. There is a good match of teachers and support staff to the needs of the curriculum. The provision of resources for learning is satisfactory overall. Accommodation for the delivery of the physical education curriculum is unsatisfactory because girls have to travel to off-site facilities, reducing the learning time available in lessons. Facilities are temporarily reduced further as tennis courts are out of use due to the current building works. The accommodation is unsatisfactory for the teaching of music and design and technology where the rooms are too small for practical activities, and in art where lessons are sometimes taught in inappropriate non-specialist rooms. These restrictions negatively affect girls' achievement.
40. Nevertheless, the limitations of the accommodation are generally managed well, with clear priorities for development which are appropriate. The refurbishment programme is well planned and thoughtfully considers issues such as access for people with disabilities.
41. Provision for literacy is good. Literacy forms an integral part of teachers' planning with significant progress being made in speaking and listening, reading for meaning and understanding, extending written responses, and the shaping of writing generally. However, there are too few planned opportunities to monitor and evaluate the whole-school policy in practice.
42. Despite the whole-school numeracy policy being sparse in detail, the use of numeracy by other subjects significantly enhances their work. Geography, for example, makes very effective use of statistical information and modern foreign languages uses pie-charts when comparing sets of data.
43. Provision for ICT across the curriculum is unsatisfactory, mainly because of a lack of consistency due to difficulties of access to the ICT suites and the lack of resources in departments. There is good use of ICT in geography, history, modern foreign languages and English. In other subjects the use of ICT is underdeveloped.

Sixth form

44. Curriculum opportunities overall are good. The provision is broad and balanced, and meets the aspirations and expectations of parents and of the students who stay on into the sixth form. There is a good range of sciences, humanities, modern foreign languages, accounting and

business orientated subjects, including ICT. Other A-level subjects and vocational subjects are offered in school and strengthening collaboration with other local schools ensures that other A-level subjects and level 1 and level 2 courses are available off site. Numbers in some subjects are very large, creating heavy marking loads for teachers. The sixth form curriculum is cost effective overall. The numbers going into higher education have increased by 50 per cent over five years and are now above average.

45. Personal and social education lessons include study skills. Physical education is recommended as an optional course, and includes a large range of activities. All students are encouraged to participate in a weekly religious education course. Students may take a key skills lesson in ICT, and an A-level general studies course. Some students take the accredited European driving licence, which equips them with competent computer skills.
46. Extra-curricular opportunities are good. They include visits to the opera, theatre and cinema, skiing holidays, dry-slope skiing, foreign exchanges, holidays, attendance at conferences and lectures, a sixth form choir, Christian Union, Young Enterprise, public speaking and charity fund-raising initiatives.
47. Accommodation for sixth form students is unsatisfactory. The main study room is extremely cramped and there is no social area for students.

Care, guidance and support

The school provides a **good** level of care for its girls. Health and safety procedures are managed well. Girls are helped to settle into the school when they first arrive and procedures to help them transfer from one stage of their education to the next are well organised. There are not enough opportunities for girls in Years 7 to 11 to voice their opinions, though this is not the case in the sixth form.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Monitoring and supporting of girls are good and improving, helping them understand how well they are doing.
- Relationships between teachers and girls are very good and help promote confidence.
- Good arrangements for the induction of new girls ensure they settle in quickly.
- Opportunities for girls to voice their views and have them acted upon are underdeveloped.
- Students receive good information prior to entering the sixth form and are well supported throughout Years 12 and 13.
- Students make a good contribution to the running of their sixth form and feel their views are listened to and acted upon.

Commentary

48. The school provides good support for its girls' personal development on a day-to-day basis and as a result girls are confident and relaxed as they move through the school. Teachers and tutors know girls very well and have a genuine concern for their progress and welfare. Girls have trust and confidence in their teachers and find them approachable and responsive. Throughout the school, the very good relationships result in teachers and girls interacting well and there is a relaxed and purposeful atmosphere.
49. The role of tutors is developing as they take on greater responsibility for monitoring girls' academic progress. In Years 10 and 11, girls have two interviews a year with their tutor to look at progress. In this way, girls know how well they are doing in subjects and are becoming more involved in setting their own targets, though there is some way to go. Those girls identified as needing extra help are supported by teachers and the learning mentor.

50. Girls settle quickly and comfortably into Year 7 through a well-planned approach. Very early in the term, girls have a residential weekend away with their tutors and year head. This helps them to forge strong bonds with each other and with their teachers early in their secondary school life.
51. There are few formal opportunities for girls to put forward their views and they are rarely consulted on aspects of school life. A school council is being set up but this was not greeted with enthusiasm by the girls. Only Year 7 and Year 10 girls volunteered to be members of the school council. Many others felt a council would have little effect as they feel they are not listened to. On an individual basis, girls do feel they can talk to teachers and the dialogue is good. Girls are actively involved in the charity work that goes on throughout the year and genuinely enjoy helping other people.
52. The school pays good attention to the physical care and well-being of its girls. There is an effective child protection policy which follows the local authority procedures and good use is made of outside specialist agencies where necessary. Arrangements for dealing with sickness and accidents are good and there are regular checks on fire systems and equipment. Overall, the school is a safe place to work. The management and co-ordination of the current building works are good and keep the inevitable disruption to a minimum. Good communication keeps health and safety in the forefront of everyone's mind.
53. The school takes positive steps to ensure girls' welfare needs are recognised and met. The learning mentor plays a part in addressing the welfare needs of individual girls across the school, from supporting new girls in Year 7 in the first weeks at school, to giving individual girls in Year 11 guidance and help in self-organisation and revision/study skills. The learning mentor's links with the school's pastoral system through the heads of year are very good, and close liaison with the school's education welfare officer brings many benefits to girls experiencing difficulties.
54. The school prepares girls well for later stages of learning and employment, with regular careers lessons as part of the citizenship programme. The Connexions co-ordinator visits the school on two occasions each week to interview girls and advise about career options. Careers advice is also available at the Year 9 options evening and at the Years 10 and 11 parent consultations evening. Girls undertake work experience in Year 10. Good preparation and follow-up enables girls to gain a useful understanding of the world of work. The careers room is open on a daily basis and girls are encouraged to 'drop in' for advice from the Connexions advisor and girls from the sixth form who act as careers assistants. As a result, girls make informed choices about their futures. Girls are complimentary about the advice given and the guidance offered by the school. The new co-ordinator responsible for careers is making a significant improvement for careers support and guidance.

Sixth form

55. Advice, support and guidance are **good** overall. Tutors are chosen who know the students well. They meet their tutor group every morning, and deal promptly with matters arising. They involve students in their individual target setting, and they mentor them and evaluate how well they are progressing twice a year. Tutors are involved with enabling students to develop their study skills, and with preparing their personal statements for university applications. Students are well prepared for entry into the sixth form, and subject teachers are always available for advice when they are in Year 11. Careers advice and opportunities for independent research through the careers office are good, and there are good strategies in place for careers interviews to be arranged through the head of sixth form.
56. The programme for careers advice in the sixth form is comprehensive and detailed. Students have the opportunity of a one-to-one interview with the Connexions advisor about career prospects and further education. Students who are likely to leave the school at the end of Year 12 are targeted at an early date with clear guidance about career options. Regular guidance about UCAS applications and references are available from mentors together with advice from

representatives from higher education about accommodation and financial management. Girls are grateful for the quality of advice they are given

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has a **good** partnership with its parents, with the local community and with other schools and colleges, which supports and develops girls' learning and experiences well. It also enjoys fruitful links with other parts of the diocese.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents are mostly satisfied and are supportive of the school.
- Parents receive good quality information on school life and activities but annual reports on girls' progress are still unsatisfactory.
- Parents' views are not regularly sought through active consultation.
- Good use of the local and wider community enriches the curriculum for all girls in the main school and the sixth form.
- Arrangements for ensuring new girls settle quickly in the main school and the sixth form are good.

Commentary

57. Overall, the school serves all parts of the diocese well. It feels it is giving parents the kind of school they want and most parents are pleased with the service they get. Their daughters enjoy being at school and achieve well.
58. Families show their support in a variety of ways and particularly impressive is the work of the parents' association which consistently raises money to help the school in many ways. For example, parents always provide funds for the prestigious and enjoyable annual prize night in Liverpool Cathedral.
59. Some parents feel they do not get enough information on how well their daughters are doing and there is some evidence to support this. The interim report gives parents a good snapshot of their child's progress part way through the year. The fuller report later in the year has some good aspects such as the girls' self-evaluation in which they look back at their achievements and also consider which areas they need to improve on. However, the comments from subject teachers vary in quality and usefulness. They concentrate more on attitudes than achievement and the targets are mostly too general to act as practical aids to help girls improve or show how parents can help and support learning at home.
60. The school generally handles complaints well and communication between individual staff and parents is good, which results in effective support for many parents and girls. However, the school does not consult parents on a regular basis to ensure they are satisfied and to give them the opportunity to voice their views, and a very small number feel that the school does not deal with their concerns adequately.
61. The school uses its local and wider community well through a varied and well-planned range of trips, activities, speakers and specialists for all year groups. These add an important extra dimension to girls' learning, helping them to see the relevance of their studies and giving them first hand experience.
62. Girls join the school from a great number of primary schools and they settle in quickly and well. Curriculum links with these primary schools are very limited. However, in modern foreign languages, staff have started some work to teach young girls French in one of the feeder schools. This is providing specialist language teaching for that primary school and acting as a bridge into secondary school life. The scheme has proved so successful that two other primary schools have asked to be included in it.

63. Partnership with parents is a developing area. The school's recent decision to use a computer-based assessment process for determining levels of specific learning difficulties among pupils has resulted in parents being given very clear analysis of their child's difficulties. It also explains to parents how and why the school might seek the advice of the educational psychologist in response to parental concerns, which is a very useful tool should disagreements arise. Meetings held on an individual basis with the parents of new girls, at which the local authority specialist teacher together with the special needs co-ordinator explain the support given, are an important and positive step forward for the school in improving its provision for girls with special educational needs.

Sixth form

64. In the sixth form, there are some good links with local colleges and universities which help students prepare for life after school and also help them to develop a new way of working in the sixth form. Liverpool Hope University is used as a venue for the Super Learning Day for Year 12 when they explore and develop their independent learning skills. Staff from Liverpool University also work closely with sixth form students to help them practise application and interview skills.
65. The school works very closely with a neighbouring school to widen the curriculum in the sixth form. Good communication and management make this an effective link and the range of courses is being extended in September 2004.
66. Students are very happy with their sixth form, and almost all very much enjoy being a member. Students feel confident in approaching any teachers with academic problems. In the questionnaire, students stated that they did not receive enough information about sixth form courses while in Year 11, but during the inspection they stated that they had ample information, and had access to further information if they needed it. This is an improving area. Students believe that their views are considered, and that if suggestions are rejected, good reasons are given. Although there is not a huge take-up of extra-curricular opportunities in the sixth form, due largely to a heavy workload, there is a large range of opportunity.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are **good** and staff in management positions play an important part in planning the school's improvements. Governors are effective in their roles and contribute to the school's self-evaluation and improvement planning processes. The headteacher gives a clear direction for improvement and this lead is largely reflected by all those in management positions.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school is well led and managed.
- The headteacher, senior staff and others in management positions have a clear focus on raising standards.
- The sixth form is very well led and managed.
- While there are strengths in the school's evaluation of its own effectiveness, the full range of national assessment information is not used well enough.

Commentary

67. Leadership is good and there is a noticeable attention to raising standards in most areas of the school's work. Staff work hard and there are high expectations on them to evaluate their own performance and that of the pupils and students they teach in order to improve examination results. The school is generally successful in this, and in some instances very successful. However, the range of information the school uses to measure how successful pupils are is limited, and little use is made of national performance information to aid the evaluation of

school performance. For example, some staff were surprised that the percentage of girls obtaining the highest GCSE grades was below that expected for girls in this kind of school, though in modern foreign languages, staff are familiar with this information and have used it to improve results in line with those expectations. Nevertheless, the school's planning for evaluation and improvement is well managed and involves all staff at appropriate levels. As a result, standards continue to rise.

68. The school is well managed. Responsibilities are clearly defined and those with responsibilities are monitored and their work evaluated. There is a clear line management structure and departmental performance is monitored and evaluated regularly. Teachers are observed teaching regularly as part of performance management and also as part of departmental evaluation. Feedback is constructive and focused on supporting staff in their professional development.
69. Departments are generally well led and managed. However, the management and leadership of special educational needs are unsatisfactory. Provision for girls with special educational needs does not extend to Years 10 and 11, although some girls in those years are identified as having special needs. There is no plan to improve provision through withdrawing girls from lessons for specialist support, evaluating existing work, developing teaching and learning styles to meet girls' needs, or ensuring that special educational needs becomes a whole-school issue.
70. The governance of the school is good overall. The governing body is very committed to the school. It has a clear vision, is decisive and gives strong direction for improvement. It challenges senior managers hard. Governors work hard to meet their statutory obligations and insist on offering wide curriculum choices to girls. Whilst statutory links with the school are secure, links with departments are not strong enough to allow a clear awareness of strengths and weaknesses. The governors have themselves raised the very substantial sum required to meet the school's share of the cost of new building.

Financial information

Financial information for the year April 2002 to March 2003

Income and expenditure (£)		Balances (£)	
Total income	2,748,760	Balance from previous year	17,873
Total expenditure	2,766,246	Balance carried forward to the next	387
Expenditure per pupil	3,187		

71. The governors have put in place the systems to manage and control the finances requested by the local education authority. The new bursar and the chairman of finance work closely to ensure that the governors manage their finances on accurate information so that approaches to financial management help the school achieve its priorities in a satisfactory manner. The use of the principles of best value is satisfactory.
72. Though the costs of the school per pupil are high, the school gives good value for money.

Sixth form

73. The sixth form is led and managed **very well**. Numbers entering the sixth form have steadily risen since the head of sixth form took over. Links with another sixth form have been established in order to broaden curricular opportunities, and more links are being planned. The head of sixth form successfully manages the ten tutors who oversee the progress of students effectively. Students have considerable respect for the head of sixth form and appreciate the provision made for them.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Overall, girls achieve well and the least able girls achieve very well.
- Teaching and learning are very good, as are girls' attitudes to their work.
- The contribution to raising literacy skills is very good.
- ICT is not used enough.
- More Year 11 girls could attain the highest grades, particularly in English literature.

Commentary

74. Attainment of girls in Year 9 and Year 11, in the national tests and GCSE examinations in 2003, was well above average. Girls are maintaining high standards and progress over time is good, given that their attainment on entry to the school is above average.
75. In the end of Year 9 national tests taken in 2003 the attainment of girls was very high compared with the national average and has improved in recent years, with a significant increase in the proportion attaining the higher levels. Compared with schools where girls' prior attainment is similar, results were very high. In the GCSE examinations in 2003, results were well above average and very high compared with the performance of girls in similar schools. Results have improved in recent years with the percentage of girls reaching the very highest grades doubling since 2002. Despite this increase, comparisons with results in similar schools show that the percentage of girls obtaining the highest grades is still below that expected. The progress made by the least able girls is very good. By focusing solely upon GCSE English language, these girls achieve very well compared to their prior attainment. Attainment in GCSE English literature is rising, with all girls entered for the examination in 2003 achieving a grade A*-C pass. Despite a rise in the average points score, fewer girls achieved the highest grades; this has implications for studying the subject beyond GCSE level.
76. The standard of work seen in Year 9 and Year 11 is well above average, with a greater proportion of girls working at the higher levels. Accuracy in spelling and grammar is good, as is girls' knowledge about language. Lower attaining girls' comprehension skills are good and these pupils illustrate points with appropriate examples, and their oral responses, whilst sometimes brief, show deeper levels of insight than is apparent in their writing.
78. Across the attainment range girls show a very good awareness of the social and historical context of the texts studied, a good sense of plot and character and an improving awareness of audience and the writer's craft. Extended writing, particularly on pre-1914 literary texts, is a real strength. The setting strategy, and the emphasis upon improving literacy, is enabling the higher attaining girls, including those who are gifted, to make good progress and girls in Year 9 are already performing at much higher levels as a result. The continued emphasis on literacy is just beginning to make an impact upon the achievement of all girls in Year 10 and 11, and can be seen in the rising pass rate at GCSE. Across the school, girls with special educational needs and girls from ethnic minority backgrounds all make good progress. Girls with English as an additional language make very good progress, particularly in speaking and listening in Years 10 and 11.

78. Learning is very good because of the very high quality teaching. Lessons are very well planned, well resourced and conducted at a fast pace. Formative assessment is very thorough and marking is both rigorous and consistent. Individual target setting is informally done but the high standard of marking ensures that girls know what they need to do to improve their work. Teachers have high expectations, offer a good degree of challenge and use questioning effectively to assess girls' understanding and progress. The more interactive approach to teaching and learning has been the biggest improvement since the last inspection. Girls are expected to participate actively in class and their approach to both written and oral work is highly commendable. Discussion work of high quality, particularly in Years 10 and 11, was observed during the inspection. Behaviour and relationships are very good, as is the commitment to learning.
79. Leadership and management are good. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching are very good and contribute to the high quality of provision. There is a particularly good match of teachers' expert knowledge and understanding to teaching in the main school. The school's internal assessment procedures are good and teachers use the data well, particularly to assign girls to sets and to monitor progress. However, not enough use is made of national data to ensure that girls in Year 11 continue to make progress in line with their prior attainment in Year 9. The curriculum is rich and diverse, with more emphasis on media studies and multicultural literature than in the last inspection. ICT is included in planning and the department has tried to improve access to computers and its use of an interactive whiteboard. However, access for classes to the ICT rooms remains unsatisfactory and this detracts a little from the very good provision. A variety of approaches have been trialled to encourage girls to read more widely but personal independent reading is not yet monitored effectively.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

80. Provision for the teaching of literacy is good overall. It is very good in English, drama and science, satisfactory in mathematics and music and good elsewhere. The school places an emphasis on the development of extended writing and reading for meaning, and this is having a positive effect on girls' literacy skills. Literacy, along with other cross-curricular elements, is being taught in a systematic way in all subjects. The whole-school policy is supported by an effective marking policy that involves displaying the key annotations teachers use in classrooms to help girls understand. Girls display confidence in oral work, particularly in small group discussion and debate. Well-planned lessons provide many opportunities for developing good writing skills through the drafting and redrafting of work, particularly in English.
81. Where standards are above average, girls have secure knowledge and understanding of technical vocabulary and demonstrate this in their extended writing. Girls are encouraged to use dictionaries and girls in Year 7 are provided with a subject-specific dictionary, compiled by the English department, incorporating core vocabulary for all subjects. The school gives support to girls whose literacy skills, on entry, are particularly weak. Departments have stocks of books in classrooms (while the new library is being built) to ensure that girls are well supported in finding the resources they need. Access to a range of newspapers, including quality broadsheets, is available in the careers library.

Modern foreign languages

The provision in modern foreign languages is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- National test and GCSE results are well above average.
- Teaching and learning are very good and promote high standards.
- Leadership is focused on raising standards.
- Pupils' attitudes are very positive, particularly in response to challenging teaching.
- There are very good opportunities to study languages.

- The use of ICT, whilst much improved since the last inspection, is inconsistent.

Commentary

82. In 2003, at the end of Year 9, results in teachers' assessments were well above average, as in previous years. Unusually, all girls take GCSE French and in 2002 results remained well above average. They were also well above average in German, in spite of limited teaching time. Whilst results in French, German and Spanish GCSE fell in 2003 due to long-term teacher absences, they remained well above national averages.
83. Currently, standards at the end of Year 9 and 11 are well above average in French and Spanish, and above average in German. The most able girls make very good progress and girls with special educational needs and English as an additional language make good progress, particularly in listening and speaking.
84. Listening is well above average and speaking is above average. All girls respond with understanding to the language being taught for all aspects of their work. By the end of Year 11, they discuss a wide range of topics at normal speed, with reasonable accents. Girls are fortunate to have teachers from the countries they are studying (native speakers) or excellent linguists to copy.
85. Writing is well above average, reading is above average and the use of language is very good. By the end of Year 9, most girls write extended passages in accurate language. They use authentic linking structures and sophisticated phraseology, often modelled by native speakers. By the end of Year 11, most girls use a wide, well-learnt vocabulary and write about present, past and future events, handling written language confidently.
86. Teaching and learning are very good overall, better in Years 7 to 9 than in Years 10 and 11. In German, learning and teaching are good. All teachers have excellent subject knowledge and insist on the use of French, German or Spanish for all communications. This is a major factor in the rapid development of girls' listening and speaking skills. Girls' progress is extremely carefully monitored and good feedback is given which helps them to improve their work, an improvement since the last inspection. Teachers have very high expectations; lessons are challenging and conducted at a rapid pace which pushes girls of all abilities to produce their best work. Teachers and girls always take homework seriously and learning is securely memorised. Lessons are well planned and resourced, and a range of teaching and learning methods is used. Girls work confidently and independently, in pairs and groups. Occasionally, learning objectives are insufficiently clear. The use of ICT, whilst satisfactory overall and much improved since the last inspection, is inconsistent.
87. Leadership of the department is determined, dynamic and focused on raising standards. The head of department is supported well by a hard-working team. The school provides very good opportunities for the study of languages.
88. The school has made good progress since the last inspection. Standards have risen, German has been successfully introduced, and teaching has improved.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The quality of teaching and teachers' command of the subject are good.
- ICT is underused in teaching.
- Good relationships and good pupil behaviour together promote a good pace in learning.
- Some lessons with younger girls do not present sufficient challenge.

- Analysis of test results is insufficiently focused.

Commentary

89. In the 2003 curriculum tests taken by 14 year olds, attainment is well above the national average. The test results represent a year-on-year improvement. In the light of the attainment of these girls on entry in 2000, their results represent good progress. In the 2003 GCSE examinations for 16 year olds, results were again well above national averages. These results represent a drop from the last two years' results. They nonetheless represent good progress when evaluated against the girls' attainment at age 14 in 2001.
90. Standards in lessons seen at age 14 are above average overall. In a minority of lessons, however, girls are not being adequately challenged. In one lesson, the work being done and then assessed by the teacher showed all girls getting correct answers to all problems – they found the work too easy. In another, a Year 7 lesson, all girls asked had covered the topic being taught as part of their Year 6 work. However, there are challenging lessons. In one such lesson, a class of more capable girls processed information to construct a cumulative frequency step polygon and confidently used it to determine features such as the interquartile range. In lessons for 16 year olds, standards again are above average overall and girls achieve well. A small group of more able girls was following an A-level programme involving vectors, having completed their GCSE examinations a year early. Another class used the algebraic discriminant to solve quadratic equations but, when dealing with surds, few girls made estimates to check the reasonableness of their calculated value. Girls achieve well in Years 7 to 9.
91. The quality of teaching and learning is good. There were examples of very good teaching and an equal number of lessons where it was satisfactory. Teaching and learning are marginally better for 14 to 16 year olds than for those aged 12 to 14. The best teaching is characterised by good planning based on prior learning and a high level of challenge. Only rarely is progress slowed, for example, when a number of girls became confused dealing with a term containing multiple negatives. Only in one lesson did inappropriate behaviour of a minority slacken the pace of work. In the overwhelming majority of lessons, good teacher-pupil relationships and the teachers' command of the subject allowed the work to move at a good pace. Homework, based firmly on class activities, is a regular feature but marking of it rarely provides guidance on how to improve. No teacher was seen using ICT effectively and ICT is not a significant feature of girls' past work.
92. The leadership and management of the department are good. Test results for individuals are closely monitored and comparisons made with predictions to good effect. Extension of this work would allow a clearer identification of groups requiring remedial action. For example, no use is made of the annual national standards and predictions that appear in the DfES Autumn Package. The department's work on numeracy is having a beneficial effect in other departments. Lesson observations by the head of department are well planned, helpful and contribute to the sharing of good practice.
93. Improvements since the last inspection are satisfactory. Overall standards remain high. Assessment data is still not employed to full effect. Teaching strategies have become more varied but more still needs to be done. Homework is now used effectively to support learning in the classroom.

Mathematics across the curriculum

94. The mathematics department has a basic policy for numeracy across the school. It lacks subject-specific detail that would make it more useful to other departments. Despite this, numeracy in many other subjects, most notably geography, science, art, physical education, English, and modern foreign languages, is good. The recent numeracy in-service training day

has had a positive effect in raising awareness of the importance of numeracy across the curriculum.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Girls achieve well.
- Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 to 11.
- Management is very good.
- ICT is used well for research but a shortage of computers limits its use in laboratories.

Commentary

95. National test results, at the end of Year 9 in 2002, were well above the national average and well above average when compared with results in similar schools. In the 2003 tests, the proportions of girls achieving the nationally expected levels were slightly higher. Although results have fluctuated since the last inspection, they have risen overall.
96. In the 2002 GCSE dual award examinations, the proportion of girls gaining A*-C grades was very high and all girls entered gained an A*-G grade. The proportion gaining A*-C grades was not as high in 2003, but more girls were entered for separate sciences. In the 2002 single award examination, results were well above average, but fell significantly in 2003 when fewer candidates were entered. In the 2002 and 2003 examinations for separate sciences, a high proportion of girls gained high grades.
97. Standards of work in Years 7 to 9 are well above average and reflect recent test results. Achievement is good. By Year 9, girls show very good gains in knowledge and understanding of scientific facts and concepts; their explanations are clear and they make good use of scientific terminology. Most girls are able to apply their knowledge effectively when explaining novel situations. Investigative skills are sound and girls carry out practical work confidently. They show good application of number, especially in physics. Achievement in Years 7 and 8 is hindered a little by a shortage of teaching time, which is less than that normally recommended. In Year 9, girls benefit from specialist teaching that prepares them well for their studies in Years 10 and 11.
98. In Years 10 and 11, standards continue to be well above average and achievement continues to be good. The opportunity to take separate sciences at GCSE allows some girls, often the more able, to take their knowledge and understanding of biology, physics and chemistry to greater depths. They write and speak fluently and use sophisticated scientific terminology. Investigative work is of a high standard; data is analysed well, graph work is very good and experimental evaluation is well developed. Girls taking the dual award have a very good understanding of the three disciplines involved. Their recall of previous work is very good and they express their ideas clearly. Their practical skills are very good and the more able take responsibility for their own work very confidently. Girls taking the single award show less depth and sophistication in their understanding, but have a secure knowledge base. They have clear recall of previous work and carry out practical work with care and accuracy.
99. Attitudes to work across all the year groups and across the ability range are very good indeed and contribute significantly to the good progress made. Girls show a keen interest and most enjoy their science lessons. They are conscientious and want to do well. Presentation of work is commendable.

100. Teaching and learning are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. All teachers show a very good command of their subject. They plan lessons well to include a variety of activities that make good use of time and that engage girls effectively. Explanations are clear and progressive and this results in secure learning. Teachers ensure that girls' notebooks are well organised and that they form a good resource for revision. Practical skills are taught rigorously so that girls develop very good codes of practice as they pass through the year groups. Work is almost always challenging and, especially amongst the more capable groups, girls are often given opportunity to develop skills of independent learning. Homework is set regularly and is generally useful in extending girls' understanding and in consolidating work done in lessons. Teachers make good use of the ICT that is available, but too little is used in scientific experimentation. Preparation of girls for external tests and examinations is very thorough. Technical support is of a very high standard indeed and contributes significantly to teaching.
101. Leadership is fragmented but overall effective. The departmental development plan does not give a clear vision for science as a whole. Management by the three heads of separate sciences and years 7 to 9 is very good; they have a very well organised working relationship and a strong commitment to raising standards. Whilst there is much well-constructed assessment of girls' progress and much extra support provided, the profiling of girls' progress is still in the early stages of development. Girls are not clear about the levels they are achieving or about their targets. However, the results of some good analysis of girls' performance are being used appropriately to inform curricular planning.
102. Improvement since the last inspection is good. Standards by Year 9 and by Year 11 have risen and a good curriculum has been developed that has widened opportunities for girls. Opportunities for independent learning have improved and investigative and experimental work has been extended. There is much more use of ICT in day-to-day teaching, especially for research, but a shortage of computers is limiting its use in scientific measurement and investigations. Technical support time is insufficient.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

Provision in ICT is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers use their good specialist knowledge effectively to guide girls' learning.
- Girls have excellent attitudes to the subject.
- Knowledge and understanding of control technology is underdeveloped.
- In Years 7 to 9, girls' understanding of the use of ICT is too narrow.
- The time allocated for the subject in Years 7 to 9 is insufficient for girls to consolidate their learning.

Commentary

103. In the end of Year 9 teachers' assessments in 2003, attainment was well above average. These assessments are not a true reflection on girls' attainment as they did not include all the programme of study. Although results in the most recent ICT GCSE examination were not as high as the previous year's, they were still above the national average.
104. Girls enter the school in Year 7 with average understanding. Achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory and by the time the girls reach 14 standards are at the level expected. The time allocated for the subject in Years 7 to 9 is below that normally found and, as a consequence, girls do not have sufficient time to consolidate their learning. As girls' attitude to learning is excellent it is likely that, given a full entitlement, attainment would be above average. Girls' knowledge of how to present information is good. They are confident users of the word-processing application and use desktop publishing techniques to add art images to improve their documents. They also have a good understanding of multi-media presentation. In Years 7 to 9, girls' understanding of the use of ICT beyond the school is too narrow, few being able to

give examples of where it might be used. Girls' knowledge of control technology is not as good as it should be and this is due to the lack of opportunities to study this element in depth. The school is aware of this and plans to include this component in future programmes of study.

105. In lessons observed, discussion with girls and work seen during the inspection, achievement is satisfactory and standards in Year 11 are average overall. However, the attainment of girls studying the GCSE course is better and achievement is good. Girls' understanding of presenting information continues to improve, using a range of applications to include a website with hyperlinks. Their understanding of the use of a spreadsheet is well established. Girls with special educational needs make satisfactory progress.
106. Teaching overall is good and as a result girls learn well. Lessons are generally planned well but there are rare occasions when the content of the activity lacks challenge, failing to take into account girls' previous learning. Teachers have good relationships with girls and use their good subject knowledge effectively to quickly engage girls' interest and attention, adding pace to lessons and contributing positively to learning. A strong feature within lessons is the way teachers move round the class advising girls on how to develop their skills and improve their work. Although lessons finish with sessions aimed at ascertaining how well pupils have learned, these are often too brief, with limited opportunities for girls to present and talk about their own work.
107. The leadership of the subject is good. Since being appointed, the head of department has overseen many changes, in particular the revised schemes of work that now reflect the requirements of the national ICT strategy. Management is satisfactory. Although teaching is monitored as part of performance management, the monitoring by a subject specialist is underdeveloped. Assessment procedures are not fully implemented and need to be refined in order to inform girls' progress more accurately and to guide future planning.
108. The improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

109. At the time of the last inspection the provision for ICT in other subjects was judged to be unsatisfactory. Although some subjects have made provision in their schemes of work, use of ICT is not consistent. This is partially due to difficulties of access to the ICT suites and the lack of resources within departments. However, good use of ICT was seen in geography. Here girls made sophisticated use of spreadsheets, logging information about the size of stones in a riverbed and displaying their findings in graph form. Effective use was also seen in history, using the Internet for research about monarchs and Robert Owen, a factory owner and social reformer. With the exception of modern foreign languages and English, the use of ICT in other subjects to support girls' learning is underdeveloped.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are well above average overall and girls achieve well.
- Teaching and learning are good and standards are rising before the age of 14 because teachers are introducing new, more challenging methods.
- There is no strategy in Years 10 and 11 to support those of lowest prior attainment and there were fewer A* and A grades than might be expected at GCSE at 2003.
- Assessment procedures do not yet identify sharply enough the learning needs of individuals.

Commentary

110. By the age of 14, girls attain well above the national average from a low base of geographical knowledge when they enter the school. At GCSE in 2003, results were significantly above the national average but there were fewer of the highest grades than would be expected from girls of such high prior attainment. A few girls of lower prior attainment under-attained at GCSE in 2003. Coursework marks were too low. Standards of work seen in Year 9 and on the GCSE course are above average and standards of work in girls' books are well above average.
111. Average attaining girls do well at all stages of their learning. Girls of lower prior attainment and those with special educational needs make very good progress in Years 7 to 9 because the department deploys a specialist teacher skilfully. There is no such strategy at GCSE. Progress for all pupils in Years 7 to 9 is very good and is accelerating as girls are exposed to the highest levels of the National Curriculum, through challenging practical problems, for example in the local shopping survey in Year 8. Girls of the highest prior attainment in Year 9 made rapid progress to very high standards in a fast exchange of ideas on inner city problems. New learning styles are having a positive impact on achievement at GCSE: in lessons on tourism in Year 11 above average girls made very good oral contributions in extended discussions and Year 10 girls argued cogently about the population policies of China.
112. Teaching is good overall and occasionally very good. Teachers exploit girls' high standards in literacy and numeracy very effectively in learning geography. The quality of statistical presentation and analysis in coursework is very high and lower attainers in Year 9 manage proportional maps of the differences between rich and poor very well. Expectations of girls' work and behaviour are high and are very well met. Girls habitually collaborate very well in pairs and groups and shared learning is a particular strength of the department. Girls are efficient learners who organise and use a range of materials well. Modern technological aids enhance teaching and learning because vivid visual images rivet the attention and provoke strong responses. Where work is marked, comments encourage and show how to improve, but not all work is marked. Good work in Years 7 to 9 involves girls closely in measuring their own attainment and setting targets for improvement. However, the learning needs of individuals are not yet identified closely enough. Good use is made of commercially produced statistics to analyse previous results and to set future year group examination targets.
113. Leadership and management are good and experienced teachers demonstrate adaptability in improving teaching and learning. The school makes generous provision for fieldwork. Teachers make a notable contribution to the extra-curricular life of the school.

History

Provision In history is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good attitudes and classroom relationships make a significant contribution to learning.
- Teaching is frequently very good.
- Girls' source analysis and evaluation skills require further development.
- Problem solving and enquiry-based methods actively involve girls in their own learning.
- Assessment procedures and practice could be improved.

Commentary

114. In the end of Year 9 teachers' assessments in 2003 almost all girls reached the expected level compared to the approximately three-quarters of girls who did so nationally in 2002. This represents good achievement as attainment on entry is little better than average. In the 2003 GCSE examinations all girls gained a pass grade and the proportion achieving grades A*-C

was well above average. Overall, results were very similar to those of the previous year although the number of girls obtaining the highest grade was significantly higher.

115. By Year 9 standards of work seen are well above expectations and achievement is good. Girls of all attainment levels respond well to enquiry-based lessons and make good use of evidence in supporting their judgements on a range of historical issues. They display well-developed discussion and decision-making skills and complete a good volume of extended writing in technically accurate English, although the work of lower attaining girls sometimes contains basic spelling errors. Girls' knowledge and understanding of some areas of the curriculum, such as the adoption of steam power, is limited, and there are too few references to chronology apparent in their work. By Year 11 nearly all girls make well-organised and detailed notes, and complete high quality extended writing on topics such as how World War I changed the lives of British civilians. They select and deploy evidence from a wide range of sources well, but as yet, their analytical and evaluative skills are underdeveloped. They use computers competently for research and communication purposes although there are currently too few opportunities for practising these on a class basis. The variety of learning strategies employed makes them accessible to girls of all attainment levels, including the particularly able and those with special educational needs, and all girls achieve well as a result.
116. Teaching and learning are good overall and often very good. Girls learn well because they have very positive approaches to the subject and classroom relationships are very good. Teachers plan their lessons very thoroughly and have very high expectations of the girls. Girls learn best in those lessons taught by experienced specialists whose very detailed subject knowledge and selection of challenging tasks actively engage girls in their own learning. In lessons taught by non-specialists, learning is no better than satisfactory because of limited pace, monotonous delivery and the failure to confront errors in girls' judgements or gaps in basic factual knowledge. Work is carefully marked but errors in spelling are sometimes overlooked. Girls' understanding of how they can improve could be clearer, as the grading system used does not distinguish between attainment and effort, and National Curriculum levels are not used in day-to-day marking.
117. The subject is very well managed and led. The head of department is a good role model for girls and staff and has a clear focus on raising attainment through improving the quality of teaching and learning. The subject has played a leading role in implementing the national Key Stage 3 Strategy in its lessons and has also been in the forefront of implementing the school's literacy policy. Teachers enjoy close working relationships. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The good range of activities ensures that all girls are actively involved in their learning.
- The quality of teaching and learning is good.
- There is limited use of assessment to inform planning.
- There is a lower level of attainment in graphic products in Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

118. By the end of Year 9, girls' overall standard of attainment is well above the national average, and a significant number attain higher levels. In the 2003 GCSE examinations, results were well above the national average. Girls performed very well in textiles, food technology and resistant materials.

119. Inspection evidence shows that standards at the end of Year 9 are well above the national average. Girls make very good progress. In lessons teachers provide planned opportunities for them to reach higher levels than are expected by the National Curriculum. Girls produce articles of good quality. They express their ideas very well and communicate their designs clearly. Girls explain the skills and processes they have used with confidence. However, very little use is made of computer design and manufacture and there are missed opportunities to broaden the curriculum provision.
120. Pupils' standards by the end of Year 11 are well above average in textiles, food technology and resistant materials. Standards are below average in graphic products. In lessons in graphic products girls are not sufficiently challenged. Where teachers have high expectations, girls make good progress and their achievement is good. They can specify a design brief and develop and express their ideas in a way that results in good quality finished products in their chosen subject. Girls are capable of high quality work, as seen, for example, in the detailed and well-presented design folders of the majority. Where girls use ICT, the quality of their work is improved. Not enough use is made of computers, particularly computer-aided design and manufacture. Girls produce supporting materials of a high standard to indicate how they have achieved their final design. They are challenged to focus clearly on the requirements of the GCSE examination. As a result they understand what they need to do and are helped to reach higher grades. Pupils with special educational needs achieve well.
121. Teaching and learning are good overall. On the rare occasion that teaching is unsatisfactory, there is a lack of specialist knowledge and the aims and objectives for the lessons are not clearly stated. Teaching in the majority of lessons is good and this leads to good learning. Teachers' enthusiasm and knowledge engage and challenge girls. All staff work hard to develop productive relationships with classes. . Key learning points are systematically reinforced and the good range of activities ensures that all girls are actively involved in their learning. New knowledge is introduced as it is needed so that students can immediately use it to develop their understanding. Teachers' planning takes into account the different needs of individual girls. The strengths of good teaching are in subject knowledge, high expectations and effective pupil management. Teachers' work is made more effective by good technician support.
122. There is an emphasis on literacy skills and teachers use technical vocabulary to help girls understand and extend their own vocabulary. Teachers place an appropriate emphasis on speaking, listening and writing skills and the use of numeracy.
123. Girls' work is marked regularly and teachers generally provide encouraging and motivating comments. There is a good level of self-evaluation. In Year 11 the good quality marking provides a commentary that shows girls how to improve their work.
124. The acting head of department provides good curriculum leadership and is managing the department well. However, the process used for the assessment of girls' attainment is not rigorous enough; assessment results are not used effectively in planning, teaching and target setting to raise standards; and the department does not analyse assessment data sufficiently.
125. The specialist teaching rooms are too small, particularly for food technology and textiles, and this sometimes slows progress. There is equipment available in the department for computer-aided manufacture, but this is not used effectively to deliver the curriculum. The department is not fully covering this aspect of the programmes of study.
126. A significant number of girls are not taking a design and technology subject in the current Year 10. This is a missed opportunity, particularly as a significant majority of girls achieved very high grades at GCSE in the previous year.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

Overall, the provision in art and design is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Girls' independent learning skills are very good.
- There is too little monitoring of performance data and reviewing how well the department is doing.
- Girls' attitudes and behaviour are very good.
- Too few girls gain the highest grades at GCSE.
- Assessment is underused to monitor pupils' progress.
- Learning is very well supported by enrichment of the curriculum.
- ICT is not used enough.
- The provision for the girls' social, moral, spiritual and cultural development is very good.

Commentary

127. In teachers' assessments in 2003 attainment was above average overall. Grades A*-C in 2002 overall were well above the national average. In 2003, results fell significantly and were well below the national average but the entry was very small and too low for accurate national comparisons. No girls gained an A* grade in either year.
128. Standards of work in Year 9 are above average but lower than the results of the teachers' assessments. Girls confidently work independently of the teacher and demonstrate a very good understanding of how to develop and research their work. Visits to art exhibitions are frequently used to provide the stimulus for projects and this raises girls' awareness of different forms of art. Girls working on a self-portrait project demonstrated an above average knowledge of a range of artists from diverse cultural backgrounds and used proportion competently to produce work in a variety of styles. Work in painting and drawing, printmaking, and sculpture is often innovative but the level of the girls' technical skill is not as advanced as their understanding. Overall, achievement is satisfactory. The achievement of girls with special educational needs is good as they respond well to the high level of individual support and teachers channel what they do best into successful pieces of artwork.
130. Standards of work in Year 11 are above average. Girls work with a high level of independence and plan and organise their own projects, following visits to art galleries, and are positively encouraged to develop their own style. This results in a high level of personal response and interpretation. Girls demonstrate the ability to explore and interpret ideas when researching areas, such as Japanese art and the effects of Hiroshima, and the linking of the imagery of war in Picasso's Guernica to the disaster of the twin towers in New York. Sketchbooks reflect a good level of analysis and annotation on concepts such as the effects of truth and fiction on race and religion. The achievement of most girls is satisfactory but the very highest attaining girls are not always challenged sufficiently to reach the very highest standards.
131. Teaching is predominantly good. All lessons seen were at least satisfactory and over half were good or better. A high emphasis is put on building on the pupils' capacity to work and think independently and this is very well supported by the high level of individual attention and advice. The girls respond well to effective teaching, and attitudes and behaviour are very good. They are well motivated, frequently pursue work in their own time and confidently discuss their ideas and how to research them. Teachers have a very good command of their subject, which is evident in the frequent references to artists and cultural influences, and this strongly supports learning. In the best lessons, teachers plan well and use a range of techniques to motivate and

stimulate girls and build on their previous learning. Where there is weakness, it is due to a lack of pace and structure to the lesson which results in girls not working hard enough although they are enjoying what they are doing. A good level of verbal evaluation is given in classes, but marking is underused and is not always diagnostic. Although achievement is good in the lessons in examination classes, achievement over the course is only satisfactory due to the lack of structure in the assessment and monitoring of the girls' progress. Teachers put a high emphasis on building on spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues and pupils' personal development is very good.

132. The management of the department is satisfactory and staff work well together. The department has a sense of vision but it is not clearly supported by strategic planning. There is too little monitoring of performance data and reviewing how well the department is doing. Although the provision for ICT has improved since the last inspection, the lack of functioning resources and the lack of training for the staff have a detrimental effect on its delivery, and it is not being used enough. Some classes are taught in non-specialist rooms and this restricts their access to a range of activities. The curriculum is strongly supported by activities such as visits to art galleries, working with practising artists, entering competitions and displaying work, which build on pupils' interest, enthusiasm and learning.

Drama

Overall, provision in drama is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Work is well matched to the demands of the examination course.
- Accommodation is unsatisfactory, but current building work is intended to resolve this.

Commentary

133. Opportunities for drama in Years 7 to 9 are planned but are limited to classroom work as access to suitable drama accommodation is currently unsatisfactory. The school has raised funding for a purpose-built drama studio and building has commenced. This should rectify the accommodation problems and enable a wider range of drama activities to take place. Girls opting to study drama in Years 10 and 11 cope particularly well with the current situation and demonstrate enthusiasm and a high degree of commitment to their work. Groups frequently take opportunities to practise their performance pieces at lunchtimes and after school and are well motivated, but the lack of facilities affects progress over time negatively. Girls' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory.
134. Although numbers taking the subject at GCSE remain small, the above average grades achieved in 2003 show a marked improvement on the broadly average results of the previous two years. More girls attained grades A* and A in 2003, so progress is currently in line with prior attainment. Learning is very good because teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject are excellent and create an environment where girls use reflection and self-evaluation well. Assessment by teachers and peers is a strength, and both written and practical work are closely linked to the examination requirements. Girls demonstrate a good awareness and control of dramatic techniques and particularly good work can be seen in their drama diaries. Provision for drama is improving as a result of the very good teaching and learning currently taking place. The school looks forward to the point where the accommodation matches the quality of teaching. All girls choosing to follow the subject achieve well.

Music

Provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at GCSE are consistently very good.
 - The standard of performance by school choirs is very good.
 - Some aspects of teaching are unsatisfactory.
 - The use of ICT is underdeveloped
 - There are insufficient ensemble opportunities for instrumentalists.
135. Pupils enter the school with standards above the national average, and with some much higher. They achieve satisfactorily from Years 7 to 9, gaining standards above average, with many having much higher standards, by the end of Year 9. School assessment, and observation during the inspection, confirms this. GCSE results in the past three years have been very high, with reasonable numbers being entered.
136. By the end of Year 9, pupils have good composition skills. In two classes observed, pupils demonstrated creative ideas for writing melodies and adding chords, voices, movement, and orchestral instruments by those who play them. Year 10 pupils are developing competent composition techniques, being able to effectively use devices such as sequence, imitation and inversion. Year 10 pupils use technology effectively, including the computer in the department.
137. Teaching and learning are good overall, though there are some elements of teaching which need to be reviewed. Pupils are given appropriate challenging tasks, and good advice is given to extend them when they are improvising. The pacing of lessons, and the lack of variety within them, leads to some pupils losing concentration too early. Movement between activities is often noisy and takes too long. There is too little emphasis in Years 7 to 9 upon the use of music technology, including computers and appropriate software. Pupils from Year 7 to 10 progress well, largely due to their very good attitudes, and to the musical talent of a significant high proportion of them.
138. Leadership and management are satisfactory. Some issues raised in the last report have been addressed, and are still being developed. Assessment is better, but there is still a need for composition and improvisation to be recorded, in order for achievement and progress to be monitored over time. Opportunities for regular ensemble practice and performance by talented instrumentalists have not been established.
139. The high standard of performance by school choirs has been maintained, and brings credit to the school. The department contributes positively to the spiritual and social life of pupils through participation in assemblies, school concerts, performances in the community, and through tours abroad. Accommodation for music is unsatisfactory, and there is insufficient music technology for schemes of work, which need to be updated, to incorporated technology more fully into the curriculum in Years 7 to 9. Most of the instruments used for practical work in the classroom are inappropriate for secondary age pupils.

Physical education

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in the GCSE examination are well above average.
- Teaching is good.

- Girls' attitudes are very good.
- Extra-curricular activities are good and girls' successes are impressive.
- Assessment is in need of updating. Methods of assessment are out of date.

Commentary

140. In teachers' assessments in the national tests at the end of Year 9 attainment was well above the national average. Results in the GCSE examinations in 2003 were well above the national average and have been so over the past two years. Girls achieved very well, with a high proportion of higher A*/A grades.
141. By the end of Year 9 standards are below average and vary between the activities taught. They are in line with expectations in netball but below that standard in swimming, where girls enter the school below the required standard. They understand the leg action of front crawl and swim confidently. They achieve well but some girls struggle to complete 25 metres unaided. In badminton girls make satisfactory progress because they increase their knowledge and understanding of the game. Standards are below average in terms of performance. Overall, girls achieve well. By the end of Year 11 standards are in line with those expected, and in some activities are frequently above average. They are above average in netball, where girls in Year 11 achieve well. They play the game with a high level of knowledge and understanding of attack and defence. At GCSE, girls' written work is well above average. The girls show pride in their work and use word-processing skills to aid presentation of their personal projects. Girls in Year 10 possess good knowledge of the circulation of the blood and use graphs to interpret data from their practical work. In practical trampoline work, girls in Year 10 achieve well, as it is a new activity for them, but standards are below average. Overall the achievement of all girls in Years 10 and 11 is good.
142. Teaching is good and has improved since the previous inspection. It is the result of very good subject knowledge and the strong relationships that teachers have with their girls. Lessons are often brisk in pace and are planned to challenge girls appropriately. Girls' progress has improved since the previous inspection because of good teaching. Girls with special educational needs are integrated well into lessons but work is not always planned to support lower ability girls. The high standards at GCSE are the result of good teaching and the very positive attitudes that girls have to their work. Girls are supportive of each other in lessons and work collaboratively in groups. Marking of work is regular but it is not always assessed to match examination grades at GCSE. Reports to parents do not report what girls know, understand or can do. Homework is used well to support learning. Teachers give freely of their time in a range of extra-curricular activities. School teams are successful and a high proportion of girls have achieved representational honours at regional, county and national level. The school athletics team were All-England champions in 2002.
143. Leadership and management are good. The head of department is a good role model and is committed to raising and maintaining standards. Good use is made of the expertise of teachers, who teach most lessons off site, but too much time is spent travelling to these facilities. Accommodation at the school is inadequate and has not improved. The recommendations of Curriculum 2000 are not yet in place.

BUSINESS AND OTHER VOCATIONAL COURSES

Leisure and tourism – Applied GCSE

Overall the quality of provision is **good**.

Commentary

144. The achievement of girls is good, given their starting points, and they make good progress. Teaching and learning are good. The lesson seen was well planned and made good use of a variety of activities, including exposition, question and answer, group work and role-play. As a result, girls are enthusiastic about their lessons and work at a good pace. The teacher was knowledgeable and provided regular opportunities for girls to contribute. The teacher was particularly effective at encouraging the least confident girls to participate in role-play. The lesson was well planned and organised. The course is well managed.

Business studies – GCSE

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

Commentary

145. Standards are above average. The girls' interest is clearly aroused by the teacher's lively presentation and she manages the class effectively, ensuring that they work hard throughout. The teaching and learning are very good. The girls' understanding develops very well, underpinned by the teacher's secure subject knowledge. The very good learning was clear from the girls' intellectual effort and the considerable gains in understanding they made, and is due to the very good teaching which both challenged and motivated them.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Personal, social and health education

Overall, the provision for personal, social and health education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The management of the course is good.
- A comprehensive programme is taught to all girls and delivered in a defined time in form tutor time.
- The course makes a good contribution to the pupils' ability to play a positive role in the school.
- Monitoring and evaluation procedures are underdeveloped.
- Teachers' training needs have been identified but not yet met.

Commentary

146. A comprehensive programme of personal, social and health education is taught to all girls in the school and makes a significant contribution to the pupils' personal development. Components of the well-planned course include a wide range of subjects and issues such as racism, diversity and stress management. The sex education programme puts an emphasis on the importance of personal relationships with strong guidance on assertiveness, decision making and problem solving. Girls are given good guidance on drugs which enables them to make informed choices. Girls are taught how to be independent and deal with the risks. Girls achieve well and make sound gains across an appropriate range of areas because teaching is at least satisfactory and, in half the lessons seen, good or better.

147. In the best practice, teachers build on pupils' confidence in discussion and challenge girls to think independently. Where there is weakness it is generally because the lesson is too teacher-led, with insufficient involvement of girls. Lessons are well planned and supported by good quality resources. The management and leadership of the well-structured course are good. The co-ordinator has a clearly defined vision of its development but as he has only been in position for a year some areas are in an embryonic state. Guidance to staff is clear and informative and teacher training needs have been identified and are planned for, but have not yet been met. Effective systems are not yet in place to monitor pupils' progress and the quality of teaching, or to ensure that all girls have an equal experience. The school recently won an award in the Healthy Schools Initiative and a website has been set up by the department to support girls' learning.

Citizenship

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The introduction of citizenship as a National Curriculum subject has been well planned and implemented.
- Leadership is good and there is a clear vision for its future development.
- A clear reflection of the values promoted within citizenship lessons permeates the wider life of the school.
- Assessment procedures are at an early stage and an effective structure is not yet in place.
- The training needs of the staff have not yet been met.

Commentary

148. Overall, girls are working at above average standards in Years 9 and 11. They achieve well. Teachers have made a sound start to teaching aspects well. Girls demonstrate good attitudes. They see the relevance of the subject and take an interest in their work and achieve well in lessons. The emphasis in the curriculum on active citizenship is in the early stages but girls are beginning to demonstrate a growing awareness of their role within the school and within the community.
149. Year 9 girls are developing knowledge and understanding about becoming informed citizens, how to make their voice heard at a local and national level and the importance of voting. They competently think for themselves and have informed views about their own rights and responsibilities. Girls study issues such as whether prison is effective in dealing with people who break the law and confidently discuss and debate quite complex issues such as whether offenders are sent for punishment or as a punishment. In discussion, girls show respect for each other's values and the diversity of their individual backgrounds. They achieve well overall.
150. Year 11 girls consider personal responsibilities and ways of dealing with different situations and how to make choices. They show a good understanding of social issues and have good skills in discussion. They can deploy their knowledge, express and justify their opinions and understand the opinion of others. Girls are given the opportunity to consider and respond to current world affairs and are taught about the role of organisations such as Amnesty International. In history, girls demonstrated a good understanding of the economics of the stock market when studying the Wall Street crash and the result of the subsequent depression. Girls are well prepared for work; they competently prepare CVs and letters of application. They achieve well.
151. Teaching is good. A high emphasis is put on helping girls to understand conflicting viewpoints on controversial issues. Imaginative planning and challenging questioning encourage girls to think for themselves. Teachers support girls well and give the girls the confidence to respond

positively to discussion and use a good variety of methods to deliver aspects. Girls demonstrate good attitudes and see the relevance of the subject. They learn well because they feel their views are of some importance and they confidently express them. The values promoted within citizenship lessons permeate the wider life of the school.

152. Girls understand their rights and responsibilities in a democratic society. Many show this in their discussions with one another and adults. However, there are currently insufficient opportunities overall for girls to take responsibilities. Nevertheless, girls are given roles of responsibility within their form which positively builds on their sense of worth and encourages them to contribute to the group. There is a strong history of raising money for charities within the school and girls demonstrate an enthusiastic commitment to this.
153. Leadership and management of the subject are good. A clear, structured, five-year plan is in place with citizenship being delivered in discrete lessons. The subject leader has a clear vision for the development of the subject and a good understanding of its strengths and weaknesses. Staff training needs for those teaching this new subject have begun to be identified, but due to the lack of a stable team these are difficult to organise and have not yet been met. Assessment is in its early stages and an effective structure is not yet in place. Systems should now be put in place to monitor and evaluate the delivery of citizenship.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

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

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 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
Biology	7	85.7	83.5	0.0	36.1	22.9	34.6
French	6	83.3	85.5	33.3	35.1	35.0	35.0
Geography	6	83.3	89.6	16.7	41.3	26.7	38.2
Mathematics	6	66.7	78.0	16.7	37.3	18.3	33.3
Other Social Studies	5	100.0	85.2	20.00	35.5	34.0	35.1

Level 3 GCE A-level and VCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art and design	5	100.0	96.7	40.0	52.3	80.0	87.8
Biology	15	100.0	92.6	46.7	38.7	78.7	76.3
Chemistry	11	100.0	95.1	45.5	49.2	85.5	83.8
English literature	18	100.0	98.7	27.8	44.1	77.8	84.7
French	8	100.0	96.4	50.0	46.1	95.0	83.2
General studies	12	100.0	91.0	50.0	30.2	91.7	70.5
Geography	25	100.0	97.9	20.0	47.3	72.8	85.3
History	14	100.0	97.4	28.6	43.43	81.4	82.6
Mathematics	12	100.0	95.0	41.7	56.4	85.0	88.3
Other Social Studies	20	100.0	95.2	40.0	41.6	88.0	79.9
Sociology	10	100.0	95.8	10.0	41.4	66.0	80.4
Spanish	8	100.0	96.3	50.0	47.2	92.5	83.4
Business	18	100.0	86.7	11.1	18.9	70.6	61.9

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very well planned lessons provide good pace and challenge.
- Good use is made of self-evaluation to develop critical thinking skills.
- Work on pre-1900 literature is a strength but work based on post-1900 texts could be better.
- There is a need to raise prior attainment in GCSE literature in readiness for post-16 study.
- Marking is a strength but more use could be made of external assessment data.

Commentary

154. Attainment in 2002 was below average. The average points score in 2003 would indicate that girls are maintaining the 2002 level of attainment. Despite this, the subject has grown in popularity and girls have achieved a 100 per cent pass rate at A-level over the past three years. Over this time there has been an increase in grades B and C but a drop in the percentage of girls achieving A grades. Standards seen in the current Years 12 and 13 are average so that progress over time is at least satisfactory.
155. Discussion with girls confirmed that they enjoyed English in Year 11 and, encouraged by their success at GCSE, more girls are studying English at post-16. However, the rise in numbers correlates with a significant increase in the number of girls from middle ability sets gaining well above average GCSE language results.
156. Teaching and learning are good. The level of teaching is better than the standards would suggest and lessons are well planned, providing pace, challenge and support. Marking is very thorough and constructive and the very good use of assessment means that girls achieve well in lessons. Group and discussion work is now a strong feature within lessons, where there is also a focus on developing girls' critical thinking skills. Girls' attainment is better in modules based on pre-1900 texts where teachers' knowledge and understanding are exceptionally good. One Year 13 lesson observed involved a presentation by two girls on the theme of love in *King Lear*. Their lively delivery demonstrated high order research and analytical skills, making excellent use of quotation, structural devices and, above all, their ability to construct logical and persuasive arguments. More use could be made of national benchmarking data to identify anomalies in girls' performance in different modules, particularly those based on post-1900 texts, and in allocating girls to teaching groups. This should support students' progress by a better match of staff interest and expertise to programmes of study, especially in the case of the post-1900 modules.
157. Overall the subject is well led and managed, and well resourced. Lessons observed and discussions with girls provide evidence that girls have a lively and positive attitude to the subject and are motivated to succeed. This motivation, coupled with good teaching, provides a good foundation for improving standards within this subject.

French

Provision in French is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in the 2003 GCE A-level examination were well above average, and students achieved extremely well in relation to their performance at GCSE.
- Learning and teaching are excellent.
- Students have excellent attitudes to work.
- Students can study two of the three languages on offer.

Commentary

158. In the 2002 GCE A-level examination, all students entered for French passed, with half attaining the highest grades. Standards were above average, an improvement on the previous year and students did well in relation to their performance at GCSE. The 2003 results were higher with five of the six students attaining the highest grades and all students attaining a good pass. In 2002, results obtained in the GCE AS-level examination were above average. Results for a considerably larger number of students in 2003 were much higher and the school's own analysis shows they did very well in relation to their performance at GCSE, particularly in the higher grades.
159. Inspection evidence indicates that standards are above average in Year 12 and well above average in Year 13. Students achieve well in relation to performance at GCSE. They understand and respond to authentic French in the discussion of complex matters, for example the identification of key themes and characterisation in a book they have just read, or the explanation of grammatical errors. They speak reasonably fluently and confidently, for example when debating vigorously the merits of watching television. They write accurately and at length about a wide range of social and political topics, using a wide vocabulary.
160. Learning and teaching are excellent. The teachers seen were French and provided excellent linguistic models for students to copy. They constantly introduce students to more authentic speech patterns, and prompt and challenge them to extend and enrich their responses. Students' work is improved by the emphasis placed on providing excellent ongoing oral and written feedback which helps them to improve their work. Regular reviews and assessments help students to identify further improvements. No time is ever wasted and lessons proceed at a cracking pace. Students are expected to work to the best of their abilities at all times and they do. Homework is well planned and conscientiously undertaken, and students undertake independent research. Examination requirements are well understood and prepared for. Students thoroughly enjoy all aspects of their learning. Good progress has been made in improving examination results and improving the quality of teaching and learning since the last inspection.

Example of outstanding practice

First in a series of lessons on Thérèse Desqueyroux, a novel by François Mauriac

Objectives of the lesson: to ensure students understand the context and foreword of the novel and to discuss the main characters.

The lesson was conducted at a rapid pace in French. The teacher's brisk, clear exposition of the context and searching questioning quickly established that it was to be a demanding lesson. Students had prepared very well and gave reflective responses, justifying them with reference to evidence in fluent French. They extended and developed their ideas in response to probing questions and improved the quality of their work by copying better turns of phrase modelled by the teacher, a French national. They took accurate notes, using the extended vocabulary carefully planned into the lesson.

Understanding of the context secure, the lesson moved rapidly on to the discussion of the main characters. Students showed themselves to be able to respond to a high level of intellectual challenge; they demonstrated understanding of the complexities of relationships and shared empathy for flawed characters. Their comments showed insight and they argued convincingly, supported and challenged by the teacher's comments and questions. The carefully planned lesson developed their language and literacy skills, and extended their vocabulary and ability to discuss and argue, as well as increasing their knowledge about the novel. The students enjoyed the lesson thoroughly, responding well to a high level of challenge.

MATHEMATICS

Provision for mathematics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' command of the subject is good.
- Students are mostly passive receivers of knowledge.

Commentary

161. In the 2003, A-level examination attainment was above the national average and continued the trend of improvement in results apparent over the past three years. Boys join the school in the sixth form and their results are consistently weaker than those of the girls.
162. The achievement of students in Year 12 is good but would be better if they were able to recall prior learning with greater ease or accuracy. For example, one class were unable to expand a standard cubic function, even after the teacher's prompting. Students in Year 13 worked very well with binomial expansions that used negative or fractional indices. In this lesson use of prior knowledge was good so that the pace of work was high.
163. Teaching and learning are good. The teachers' sound grasp of the subject and the students' willingness to learn mean that progress is good. However, in too many cases, students are passive and rarely ask questions. In all lessons teachers make students recall prior learning and, where this is firmly in place, they build on this foundation effectively. Homework is used very effectively to reinforce understanding, lessons frequently beginning with a review of tasks set for homework.
164. Leadership and management in the sixth form are good. There is a clear focus on improving standards and how this can be achieved. However, the underuse of ICT apparent in the main school extends to the sixth form.

165. Improvements since the last inspection are satisfactory. Results have continued to improve but ICT is underused.

SCIENCE

Biology

Provision in biology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Students achieve well.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- ICT is used well for research but a shortage of computers limits its use in experimentation.

Commentary

166. In the 2002 A-level examinations, results were above the national average, and were a little higher in the more recent 2003 examinations. In both years, all students gained a pass grade. The school is able to show that, relative to their GCSE results, most girls do a little better than predicted. Since the last report, numbers have risen. Results have fluctuated a little but have been above average overall.
167. Standards of work are above the national average overall and the students' progress is good. In Year 13, almost all have a secure understanding of the topics studied. They recall previous work accurately and use scientific terminology well, when, for example, they study the complex functioning of the nervous system. They give clear explanations when applying their prior knowledge to novel situations, in ecology for example. Investigative work, as seen in coursework, is of a high standard; planning, data collection, application of statistics and evaluation are very good. The students' enthusiasm for the subject and their very good attitudes to work are having a positive impact on their achievement. Students in Year 12 have, on average, a slightly lower prior attainment. They are only a little way into their course, but are already successfully taking their scientific knowledge and understanding to greater depths. They have a secure understanding, for example, of the complex nature of biological chemicals, and a good knowledge of the ultrastructure of the cell. Practical work is carried out confidently and efficiently, and good independent learning skills are being developed.
168. Teaching is very good overall and, as a result, students learn very well. Teachers show very good command of their subject knowledge when they use questions to probe students' understanding, and when they answer their unexpected questions. Explanations are given in depth, but clearly and progressively, to ensure students' understanding. Lessons are planned well to include a variety of effective teaching methods and a wide range of extra-curricular activities enriches students' learning. Year 13 students benefit much from residential fieldwork, for example. Students' independent learning skills are being very well managed and very well directed. Teachers provide a very good range of resources for students' independent use. Whilst ICT is used very effectively for research, a shortage of computers limits its use as a tool for scientific investigation. Consolidation of new work and day-to-day assessment are very good, and students are very well prepared for examinations. Marking is helpful and teachers give very good one-to-one support and guidance. Each year group benefits from the teaching being shared between two specialists, and the enthusiasm of teachers for their subject contributes significantly to the good progress students make.
169. Leadership and management of the subject area are very good. There is a strong commitment to raising standards, and to providing a stimulating and varied curriculum. Performance in biology is analysed thoroughly and the conclusions linked effectively to ongoing curriculum

development. A good team approach has been established and teachers share ideas and good practice effectively. Regular formal assessment of students' progress is monitored well. Technical support is of a very high standard and has a positive impact within the department.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Information and communication technology

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers have good specialist knowledge.
- Results in recent examinations have been below average.
- The retention from AS courses to A-level is good.
- Students have excellent attitude towards the subject.
- The good relationships between teachers and students support learning.
- There are too few opportunities for students to experience the use of ICT in the business environment and talks from visiting speakers.

Commentary

170. The AVCE ICT course was introduced two years ago and 2003 was the first occasion that students were entered for the examination. All the students entered achieved a grade but none managed to gain the higher grades of A and B. In the 2003 AS-level all the 15 students entered achieved a grade, four gaining the higher grades of A and B. This result is above average.
171. Discussion with students and examination of their work shows that those studying the AVCE course are at the expected level at this point in the academic year. However, because of the good achievement and students' excellent approach to the subject it is likely that many will exceed this level by the end of Year 13.
172. Students are confident users of the communication element, using a range of applications to produce documents that are suited to particular audiences, devising logos and using mail merge facilities. They have a good knowledge of a spreadsheet and a clear understanding of the formulas for a variety of calculations. They confidently create data systems and use macros to link to different spreadsheets with understanding. Students have recently started a new topic dealing with data handling. This is the first occasion that students have experienced a database but they are quickly gaining knowledge, entering the data and beginning to use the query facility to filter information. Although students are able to discuss the use of ICT in its wider context they have not had the benefit of first hand observation of its use in large organisations or talks from visiting speakers about the complexities of a large network.
173. Students' attitude to the subject is positive, showing a very good level of interest. They are confident to discuss their work, commenting that they find the work challenging, and consider the teaching to be of a good quality. In discussion all the students felt that they were well advised about the course and are well supported. The retention rate is good, with the majority of students continuing their studies to A-level.
174. The quality of teaching is good and as a result students learn well. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and computing skills, using their expertise well to guide students. Teachers circulate well during lessons, guiding and advising. Students welcome the individual support they are given to develop their coursework and are confident in seeking help when required, leading to good learning. Teaching at times, however, tends to be dominated by teachers

talking, with a minimum of questioning to ascertain students' understanding. The outcome of this is that students do not always fully understand their work.

175. The management and leadership of the subject are good. The head of department has a clear vision for the development of the subject. He has an appreciation of the need to maintain and improve standards. He has successfully overseen the introduction of the ICT AVCE course, a course that is proving to be a very popular choice with students.

HUMANITIES

History

The provision for history is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good.
 - Too few students obtain the highest grades at A-level.
176. In 2003 those students taking the AS level examination in year 12 were all successful and over half of them gained the two highest grades. This is above the national average, is an improvement on the results of the previous year and represents good progress and achievement in the light of their prior attainment, sometimes in schools other than St Hilda's.
177. Over the last three years all students taking the A2 examination have obtained a pass grade. However, the proportion gaining grades A-B has dropped from a peak in 2001, when it was well above the national average, but the average point score is still in line with the national average and represents good achievement and progress in the light of their prior attainment and predicted grades. The standards seen in inspection week were well above the national average and similar to those seen at the time of the previous inspection.
178. The provision for history in the sixth form is very good. It is underpinned by very good leadership and management and makes a good contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of the students. A very good feature is the way in which all students are included in the very interesting activities based on research, co-operative ventures and the communication of judgements for the benefit of the whole class. The latter involves a high degree of self-confidence and oral skills.
179. The teaching and learning observed is consistently very good. It is characterised by very good organisation of effective learning experiences for very interested students rather than the mere communication of historical content by the teacher. The students co-operate very well, help each other to learn in joint ventures tackling problems involving the use of evidence and the consideration of differing historical interpretations. They find, select and organise evidence for and against a given interpretation and make the most of the valuable experience of standing up in front of their friendly but critical peers to defend their individual and group conclusions. In so doing they advance their social, historical and oral skills and make much progress towards independent learning. Their attitude to learning is very good. Nevertheless, this has not yet translated into more students achieving the higher grades at A-level.

Psychology

Overall the quality of provision in psychology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pass rates are very good. Standards are consistently high over time in both the AS and the A-level psychology courses.
- Learning resources are good, giving students the opportunity to undertake independent learning and research.
- Assessment techniques are effective.
- Teaching is good, students speak highly of it, and they achieve well.
- In the AS provision the very large groups limit the amount of attention that can be given to individual students' needs.
- A small proportion of boys do not achieve well enough.

Commentary

180. The GCE A-level examination results for 2003 and the previous two years were consistently very high. All students who took the examinations gained a pass grade and the proportion gaining the highest grades, A and B, was above average. Most students achieve well; in relation to their GCSE grades, students did better than expected. However, the minority of boys taking A-level and AS performed less well than expected. Very few students have dropped out of either the A-level or AS courses.
181. The standards of work of current students are good. In Year 13, students achieve well. In the lessons seen students were responsive and involved in their learning. They showed good knowledge and understanding of the theories of relationships, both in their written work and in response to questioning in class. The standard of written work is high. The work sampled shows a good level of understanding and well-developed skills of analysis and evaluation, with arguments supported by evidence from appropriate studies. The teaching is well planned and involves a variety of activities.
182. In Year 12 all the students are attaining standards at least as high as can be expected of them after only a brief period of study of the subject. The majority of students show a good understanding of the psychological concepts and theory that they have studied so far. For example, in the lesson observed, students were able to use their knowledge of theories of long-term memory to analyse a variety of case studies. They were also able to confidently discuss what they had learnt previously about short-term memory and relate these concepts to the task.
183. Teaching and learning are good. Lessons are well planned and prepared and include a variety of activities. The teacher uses current examples very effectively to illustrate concepts, for example, a discussion about the website Friends Reunited to help explain concepts of computer-mediated communication. Students are responsive and work well in lessons; they are interested and enthusiastic. In group work, students support and help each other effectively and show evidence of an ability to apply theory critically to reality. When questioned in class students demonstrate a good understanding of psychological theories, concepts and issues. Students commented very favourably on the support for learning they receive in psychology. The assessment of students' work is very good. Work is set and assessed on a regular basis; feedback is positive and constructive and is based on the examination criteria for the award of marks. Feedback tells students what they must do in order to improve their work. When work is returned oral feedback is also given and the teacher goes over a model answer with the students. Teaching could be improved if some more vocal students were encouraged to give

other students the opportunity to contribute in discussions. A reduction in AS psychology group size would also help to improve teaching and learning. There are more than 30 students in the AS groups and such large groups limit the amount of attention that can be given to individuals.

184. The leadership and management of psychology are very good. The teacher has a clear sense of direction and purpose. There is a commitment to building on what has been achieved and to further improving standards. Results are analysed carefully in order to identify areas for development. There is a very good range of resources to support learning and they are regularly updated. There is an effective system of tracking students' progress in place using students' predicted grades so that remedial action can be taken if a student's work is not of an appropriate standard.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

Physical education

The provision for physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well because of very positive attitudes.
- Teaching is good.
- Standards of written work are above average.
- Relationships between teachers and their students are very good.
- Enrichment activities are limited to a few students.

Commentary

185. The first cohort of students to sit the A-level examinations was in 2003. There were four students, one of whom achieved a B grade and all of whom achieved higher than expected grades. There is a large increase in the number of students studying AS-level in the present Year 12. In the lessons observed and the scrutiny of written work, standards are above average. Students show pride in their written work and use word processing and the Internet to enhance their presentations, particularly in their individual projects.
186. Students in Year 12 make good progress in skill acquisition. Their knowledge of reaction time and of how it affects performance in sport is good. They sort playing cards into suits and colours and plot a graph of the time taken for each task. They understand that reaction time is slower when decisions need to be made. In practical work, students know the technique of a sprint start in athletics and time their performance over each ten metres of a 50-metre sprint. They draw bar and line graphs and calculate their speed and acceleration over time. Students at AS-level achieve well, though their recall of GCSE coursework is limited. For example, most students have difficulty recalling Newton's laws of motion.
187. In Year 13 students achieve well in the psychology of sport. They discuss the differences between aggression and assertiveness in sport. They understand that aggression results from behaviour which intends to harm or injure another human being and that assertion takes place within the rules of sport with no harm intended. All students have a positive attitude to their work and they are keen to learn.
188. Students make good progress because of good and very good teaching. Teachers have a good level of subject knowledge and students appreciate this. As a result there are very good relationships between students and their teachers. Lesson plans are comprehensive and contain learning objectives, which are shared with the students. Marking of work is good and

students know the progress that they are making. Homework is set regularly and supports learning.

189. Enrichment activities are available to students in curriculum time, but many are unable to take advantage of them because of their commitment to other courses.

Travel and tourism – post 16

Overall the quality of provision is very **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students achieve well.
- Teaching is good.

190. Standards are above average. Students achieve very well, their attainment levels are above average and the portfolios of evidence they produce are thorough and well presented. They respond very well to the consultative style of teaching. Their ability to think critically is developing well. Teaching and learning are very good. This is because of methodical planning and very good subject knowledge. The theoretical and practical elements of the course are interwoven skilfully, giving students realistic insight into the demands of the sector and enabling good learning. There is very good use of continuous assessment. The management of the course is very good.

BUSINESS

Business studies / Accounting

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students have a sound grasp of concepts, which they apply well in class work, in answering questions, and during discussions, and overall they achieve well.
- Teaching is good; the sessions were well structured with a range of activities which effectively help students to build up their knowledge and understanding.
- Students work well together; they share ideas and information freely.
- The subject area is very well led and there is a good range of learning resources.

Commentary

191. The GCE AS and A-level results in 2003 were good. All students who took the examination gained a pass grade and some attained the higher grades.

192. The standard of work of current students is above average. Students achieve well in relation to predictions based on GCSE results. Students perform very well as a result of effective teaching which demands much of them. The lesson structure and activities clearly focus their learning. Students recall knowledge well and apply it successfully, and their written work shows the same confidence as their class work.

193. Teaching is good and students learn well as a result. The principal features of the good teaching are clear objectives, sharp planning, brisk pace and a range of teaching strategies to bring about learning. The teacher has very good subject knowledge and uses this well in questioning and the tasks set. The lessons provide opportunities for students to practise what is discussed and their knowledge and understanding improve as the lessons progress. The

teacher summarise students' ideas effectively and provides explanations of topics studied. Students respond confidently to the activities.

194. Students learn well. They are attentive, work productively and respond very well to the supportive teaching and different learning styles they experience. They rose to the challenge of answering questions about economies of scale and productivity and the operation of accounting systems. In lessons time is used well. Students support and help each other effectively and, in groups, talk and listen to each other in a mature way as part of their learning. Students are always confident when offering ideas in more open discussion, and the less capable are always brought into the question and answer dialogues as much as possible.
195. The good teaching and learning result from work in the department being well led and managed. There is a commitment to building on what has already been achieved and to improving standards. The planning effectively reflects the course requirements and determines the level for good teaching. Recording of progress and target setting based on careful analysis of student performance from testing and assessment are well established. Learning outcomes are sharply focused.
196. The standard of students' work meets the demands of the course requirements. In the sessions observed, they were doing well as a result of effective teaching which demanded much of them. In the lessons seen students drew well on their knowledge of marketing, elements of risk and administration. The students recalled knowledge well and applied it, and written work showed the same confidence as their work in class.

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

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