

INSPECTION REPORT

ST MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC GRAMMAR SCHOOL

North Finchley

LEA area: London Borough of Barnet

Unique reference number: 101361

Headteacher: Miss U Morrissey

Lead inspector: Mrs C Worthington

Dates of inspection: 31st January - 3rd February 2005

Inspection number: 271631

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Grammar (selective)

School category: Voluntary aided

Age range of pupils: 11 - 18

Gender of pupils: Female

Number on roll: 739

School address: Nether Street
North Finchley
London

Postcode: N12 7NJ

Telephone number: 0208 446 2256

Fax number: 0208 343 9598

Appropriate authority: The governing body

Chairman of governors: Brian Hartigan

Date of previous inspection: 16th November 1998

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SCHOOL

St Michael's Catholic Grammar School is a smaller than average secondary school for girls who come from a wide area of north London, with very mixed socio-economic backgrounds. Those in the main school are practising Catholics; the sixth form is multi-faith, though predominantly Catholic. Just over one per cent of girls are entitled to free school meals, which is well below the national average. The school roll does not fluctuate as much as that in other schools; places are sought after. Just over one third of the girls are white British; about the same percentage again are of other white background and of the rest, another 20 per cent comprise those of Asian or African origin. The percentage of girls who do not speak English as their first language is higher than most schools (7.5). No pupil is designated as having special educational needs. Attainment on entry is above average. The school holds awards for Healthy Schools, British Nutrition Foundation and School's Achievement, and participates in the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Members of the inspection team			Subject responsibilities
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23031	Ian Knight	Team inspector	Mathematics
25743	Peter Butler	Team inspector	Science
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23418	Roger Yates	Team inspector	Design and technology
30695	Geraldine Dinan	Team inspector	Art
20825	Brian Ogden	Team inspector	Geography
17732	David Martin	Team inspector	History
20215	Janet Mellor	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages
15706	Roger Crocker	Team inspector	Music
3892	Eric Needham	Team inspector	Physical education
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32252	Deborah Wring	Team inspector	Latin; classical civilisation
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

OVERALL EVALUATION

St Michael's is an exceptional school which is outstandingly effective because of its excellent leadership, management, teaching and learning. The headteacher is a superb leader who is strongly supported and complemented by her deputy. Standards are very high, representing excellent achievement from girls' attainment on entry in Year 7. The school has a strong Catholic ethos and is highly regarded. Places are sought after; many old girls are leaders in their chosen professions. The school provides excellent value for money.

The school's main strengths and weaknesses are:

- Personal education, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, is excellent.
- Provision for very high ability and gifted and talented pupils is excellent.
- Girls' excellent attitudes to work make a very positive contribution to their learning.
- The sixth form is outstanding; it has grown and improved, and is a major strength of the school.
- Performance in the whole curriculum is outstanding, including physical education, despite its accommodation restrictions.
- Girls' competence in information and communication technology (ICT) is very high, in spite of a lack of external funding which restricts resources and availability to some subjects.

Since the previous inspection, the school has made very good improvement in the main school and excellent improvement in the sixth form. All minor issues have been successfully addressed. The only key issue was to improve accommodation, which has been done as far as possible with limited finances. The school is in a very good position to improve even further, but funds have not allowed for improved sports accommodation.

STANDARDS ACHIEVED

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

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

Achievement is very good in the main school and in the sixth form. Pupils are currently attaining **very high standards** from entry attainment that is lower than that in most grammar schools. The school's National Curriculum test results for pupils aged 14 years have been rising since 2000 and have been in the top five per cent of the country since 2002. In the 2004 GCSE examinations, the percentage of pupils who achieved five A*-C grades was very high, as was the points score. They were also in the top five per cent of the country. Very high standards of literacy underpin achievement throughout the school,

in spite of the high percentage of girls whose first language is not English. The school's value-added grading is 16th in the whole country. In the sixth form, students enter with grades lower than in most grammar schools, and make excellent progress overall to attain very high A-level results.

Girls' **attitudes, behaviour** and relationships with others are excellent. Sixth formers in particular readily take on responsibility and are excellent role models for younger girls. **Attendance** is very high and punctuality is good. Girls' personal qualities, including their **spiritual, social, moral and cultural development**, are excellent. Girls of all ethnic backgrounds integrate very well and racial harmony is excellent.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION

The quality of education provided by the school is outstanding. Teaching and learning are **excellent** throughout the school, and particularly in Year 7, where seventeen out of twenty lessons seen were very good or better and one quarter was excellent. Teachers have first-rate expertise, commitment, love of their subject and ambition for the success of their pupils, enabling them to make excellent progress in learning.

The **curriculum** is **very good** in the main school, providing a broad range of worthwhile opportunities that cater for the interests, aptitudes and individual needs of pupils. The sixth form curriculum is excellent with over 30 subjects able to be studied. Enrichment is excellent.

Pastoral **care** is **excellent**. The school has a very friendly and welcoming environment in which girls feel happy and secure. This enables them to achieve very well academically and to enhance their all-round, personal development. Girls receive excellent academic and personal support. The school's pastoral system is very well organised and has a positive effect on girls' learning.

The school has developed a very strong **partnership with parents**. The quality and range of information provided for parents are very good. Overall, parents have positive views of the school and a significant number are actively involved in the life of the school. The school has developed very good **links with the community**. There are very good links with other schools and colleges.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are excellent. The headteacher is an outstanding leader, very well supported by her deputy and senior management. The subject heads of department and pastoral heads are very good overall, and there is a high proportion of excellent provision. The management structure, with key stage co-ordinators rather than individual year heads, works very well, particularly for continuity of assessment and monitoring of progress. **Governance is very good**. Governors play an excellent role in maintaining the Roman Catholic ethos of the school, managing to balance this with their expectations of highest academic standards. The school achieves best value in all its financial dealings, but its low funding is a barrier to improvement in physical education accommodation and ICT resources.

PARENTS' AND PUPILS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

Parents and pupils have very positive views of the school. Parents are particularly pleased with the quality of school leadership and teaching and with the progress their daughters make to achieve high standards. They also feel their children are helped to become more mature and responsible. Girls enjoy coming to school; they relish the challenge in lessons and enjoy the many opportunities for curriculum enrichment. They feel they are very well prepared for future stages of education.

IMPROVEMENTS NEEDED

There are no major areas for improvement that have not been identified by the school's excellent self-evaluation and are being addressed. However, the school should:

- Seek external funding support from the local education authority and other sources to facilitate improvements to accommodation for sport as well as specific ICT equipment and resources.

THE SIXTH FORM AT ST MICHAEL'S CATHOLIC GRAMMAR SCHOOL
Caters for 259 students in a good range of academic courses

OVERALL EVALUATION

The sixth form is first class. Numbers have increased since the previous inspection; it is multi-faith, though predominantly Catholic. Entry requirements are quite modest for a grammar school, especially in science, but students' achievement is excellent and overall standards are very high. Despite there being no current head of sixth form, the headteacher and deputy head run it in the same excellent way as the rest of the school.

The main strengths and weaknesses are:

- The academic curriculum gains great breadth in collaboration with the partner school.
- Students' very mature attitudes enable them to adapt very well to the multi-faith sixth form.
- The year of service gives students valuable responsibility.
- Students' capacity for independent learning prepares them excellently for higher education.
- Access to ICT in school could be improved in some subjects.

QUALITY AND STANDARDS IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES OF THE CURRICULUM

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

Curriculum area	Evaluation
English, languages and communication	Provision in English literature is very good . Standards are well above average. Because of very good teaching and the maturity, commitment and enthusiasm of the students, they achieve very well.

	Provision in French is very good . Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve very well. All students take part in a valuable work experience exchange visit to a French-speaking country.
Mathematics	Provision in mathematics is outstanding ; standards are very high. Achievement, teaching and leadership are excellent.
Science	Provision in chemistry is very good . Teaching and learning are very good. Students respond positively to a variety of teaching approaches with very good attitudes to learning.
Humanities	Provision in classical civilisation is very good . Standards are very high. It is an increasingly popular subject with improving results. Teaching and learning are very good; teachers have high expectations and offer appropriate support. Provision in geography is excellent . Results are outstanding, with one hundred per cent success a consistent feature. Teaching is excellent and the extent of student independence in their learning is exceptionally good. The range of teaching and learning styles is limited by old technology. Provision in history is excellent . Results are very high in this popular subject. Students' high quality knowledge and understanding are a result of challenging and stimulating teaching. Provision in psychology is very good . Teachers' very thorough planning, assessment and high expectation ensure that students achieve the highest standards and enjoy the subject. There is little use of ICT in school. Provision in sociology is excellent . A-level results are very high in relation to students' prior attainment. Excellent teaching develops students' oral and written skills and their knowledge and understanding of sociological theory and methods.
Technology	Provision in design and technology is excellent . Students' achievement is excellent and they make rapid progress. Teaching is consistently excellent; lessons are planned exceptionally well and proceed at a brisk pace.
Visual and performing arts and media	Provision in art and design is very good . Standards are very high, and leadership, teaching, learning and achievement are excellent. There is no dedicated sixth form art room, which is a constraint on students wishing to work in their own time. Provision in drama is very good . Standards are well above the national average. Students are achieving very well as a result of the teacher's guidance and their own understanding of dramatic terms and techniques.
Business	Provision in economics is good . Good teaching and learning make a positive contribution to students' high level of attainment. Achievement is good.

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

ADVICE, GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT

The quality of advice, guidance and support for students is excellent. Procedures for induction into the sixth form are excellent and help students settle in quickly to their new courses. The high level of pastoral and academic support enables them to concentrate well on their studies. The programme of advice and guidance relating to university entrance is very well planned and provides useful information and help for students. Students have good access to a wide range of guidance materials in the careers library.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT OF THE SIXTH FORM

There is no head of sixth form at present. The acting head of sixth form is doing a very good job in day-to-day management and also has a clear involvement in its fuller development. The headteacher and her deputy have successfully established its collaboration with a partner school. They retain overall control and persistently focus on improved standards in all aspects. There are now over 30 subjects on offer through the collaboration. The headteacher and deputy head are running the sixth form in the same excellent way as the rest of the school.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Students are very happy with the sixth form. They value the excellent teaching and opportunities to take responsibility that enable them to achieve high standards and go on to higher education. The advice and guidance they receive before entry are helpful and appropriate.

PART B: COMMENTARY ON THE MAIN INSPECTION FINDINGS

STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS

Standards achieved in subjects and courses

Standards are very high; achievement is very good in Years 7 to 9 and excellent thereafter.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards in National Curriculum tests, GCSE and A-level are very high.
- Current standards are just as high as those achieved in external examinations.
- Achievement is excellent overall from a relatively low grammar school baseline.
- Very high literacy, numeracy and ICT skills underpin achievement.

Commentary

1. Standards of attainment are very high throughout the school. The 2004 results at GCSE and in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were in the top five per cent of the country. Girls enter the school with standards above average. The main criterion for entrance is that they should be baptised members of the Roman Catholic faith; the second is that their ability must be high enough for grammar school education. This leads to less competition for places than in other grammar schools which select purely on ability, and results in an intake which has lower overall ability than those accepted into other grammar schools in the area. The average points scored by girls in their National Curriculum tests for 11-year-olds show that many have only reached the expected Level 4 in one or more of the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. The majority, however, have attained the above-average Level 5 and many are well above average. The school has a high proportion of very able, gifted and talented girls, but from Year 7 onwards, deems all pupils to be in this category. The school expectation is very high, including that of girls whose first language is not English.
2. From Years 7 to 9, girls make very good progress and achieve very well in all subjects. In the National Curriculum tests for 14-year-olds, they have consistently achieved standards in English, mathematics and science that are very high and in the top five per cent of the country since 2000. The school regularly achieves measures of added value that are well above those attained nationally and in similar selective schools. In 2004, there were no validated results for English, but those for mathematics and science were similarly high.

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

Standards in:	School results	National results
English	n/a (42.4)	n/a (33.4)
mathematics	n/a (45.8)	n/a (35.4)
science	n/a (42.6)	n/a (33.4)

Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

3. In Years 10 and 11, girls' progress is excellent. They consistently work at or near their capacity; they make and sustain gains in their learning which are consistent throughout the whole curriculum. The work they are given is very demanding but the majority, including those who do not speak English at home, achieve an excellent outcome. Those who are gifted and talented achieve their full potential. The school expects all girls to achieve at least five GCSE grades of A* to C, and regularly exceeds its targets; the rising trend in its GCSE results exceeds that of the national trend. Almost all girls take 11 subjects at GCSE; results attained in all subjects are either well above average or very high. The valued added to girls' education is in the top five per cent of the country; in 2004, the school's rating in this national league was sixteenth.

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

	School results	National results
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-C grades	100 (100)	52 (52)
Percentage of pupils gaining 5 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	89 (88)
Percentage of pupils gaining 1 or more A*-G grades	100 (100)	96 (96)
Average point score per pupil (best eight subjects)	77.2 (74.9)	41.4 (40.6)

There were 96 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

4. Standards seen during the inspection matched those attained in examinations in all subjects. The subject expertise of teachers, the attention paid to assessment and the girls' excellent attitudes to learning combine to create an ethos where very high standards are expected from everybody. There is a relentless drive for improvement. The very high standards of literacy, numeracy and ICT skills underpin achievement in all subjects. These are achieved despite the fact that the school has a much higher proportion of pupils than most schools from ethnic minorities and those who do not speak English as their first language. Standards have improved considerably since the previous inspection.

Sixth form

5. Standards attained in the sixth form are very high and improving. Students enter with standards that are above average but lower than those of most comparable 17-year-olds. The sixth form is multi-faith and has a much wider ethnic mix than the Roman Catholic main school. About a quarter of the students are boys from Finchley Catholic High School, with which St Michael's has shared provision. Standards at A-level have been steadily rising and over the last three years have been well above average and usually in the top five per cent of the country, as they were in 2004. Similarly high standards were seen during the inspection.

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

	School results	National results

Percentage of entries gaining A-E grades	98.2 (97.5)	92.3 (92.3)
Percentage of entries gaining A-B grades	58.0 (58.7)	36.2 (35.6)
Average point score per pupil	395.0 (365.8)	265.2 (258.2)

There were 121 pupils in the year group. Figures in brackets are for the previous year.

6. At AS-level there is slightly lower attainment, reflecting the relatively low entry requirements for a grammar school. Nevertheless, virtually all girls achieve their predicted grades. The school expects girls to achieve a C grade to continue to A-level, where results are much higher and regularly in the top five per cent of the country. The value added to students' education is very high, enabling 99 per cent to go on to higher education; all students gain a qualification in General Studies as well as their chosen A-level subjects and this also enables them to leave the school with an all-round education. The excellent attention paid to monitoring and evaluating students' progress by academic and pastoral staff makes a very good contribution to their achievement.

Pupils' attitudes, values and other personal qualities

Girls' attitudes, behaviour and relationships with others are excellent. Attendance is very high and punctuality is good. Girls' personal qualities, including their spiritual, social, moral and cultural development, are excellent.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Girls' excellent attitudes and behaviour make a very positive contribution to their learning.
- Sixth formers take on responsibility very readily and are excellent role models for younger girls.
- Relationships across the school are excellent.
- Girls of all ethnic backgrounds in the school integrate very well and racial harmony is excellent.
- The personal development of girls is excellent.
- Girls' enterprise and willingness to take responsibility enhance their all-round development.
- Very high attendance promotes continuity and progression of learning.

Commentary

7. Girls' excellent attitudes to work make a very positive contribution to their learning. Discussions with pupils in all year groups indicate that they have positive attitudes to learning. Almost all pupils say they enjoy coming to school; they identify favourite subjects and many take part in the extra-curricular activities provided by the school. Girls are interested in what they are doing and take an active part in their learning. They listen carefully to their teachers' instructions, maintain concentration for appropriate periods of time and make positive contributions to classroom discussions. In a Year 9 science lesson, for example, pupils were keen and eager to improve their skills. They co-operated very well together, and readily evaluated the work of their

peers and themselves in a mature and constructive manner. They clearly enjoyed the lesson and became totally absorbed in their work, all of which had a positive impact on their learning. Most pupils take a pride in their work and are willing to talk about it and explain their ideas.

8. The excellent behaviour of pupils helps to create a very good climate for learning in class. In almost all of the lessons seen, girls' behaviour was often exemplary. Pupils work hard and enthusiastically, co-operate well and make very good progress during lessons. They are very well aware of what is acceptable behaviour, and what is not, and have a very good understanding of the school's system of rewards and sanctions. They accept readily the principle of sanctions as an appropriate response to any rare instances of unsatisfactory behaviour. Outside of lessons, girls of all ethnic backgrounds mix together very well. Before and after school, at lunchtime and breaks, they chat and socialise easily together without any signs of inappropriate behaviour. Racial harmony is excellent. Girls are extremely courteous and treat the school's accommodation and equipment with care and respect. There is very little litter around the site.

Exclusions

Ethnic background of pupils

Exclusions in the last school year

Categories used in the Annual School Census	Number of pupils on roll	Number of fixed-period exclusions	Number of permanent exclusions
White – background other than British	281	1	0
Other ethnic group	13	1	0

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

9. Bullying is rare. The school has a good anti-bullying policy that makes clear that it will not tolerate bullying, and staff react very quickly to any such instances. Parents and pupils indicate that these procedures are effective. The number of girls excluded in the previous academic year was very low for the size of school. Inspection of exclusion records indicates that the use of exclusion was appropriate in the circumstances.

Attendance

Attendance in the latest complete reporting year (%)

Authorised absence		Unauthorised absence	
School data	5.7	School data	0.0
National data	6.9	National data	1.1

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

10. Attendance is very high and contributes very well to the pace and continuity of learning. Punctuality is good overall.
11. The school plans and creates an excellent and unique ethos that reflects the school's Catholic traditions, and in which the girls thrive. Consequently, the personal development of the girls is outstanding. Teachers provide many very good opportunities for them to develop their self-knowledge and spiritual awareness. Respect for the feelings, values and beliefs of others is a very prominent and positive feature. The school has an excellent cultural and ethnic mix. It values, shares and celebrates the achievements of all girls across a very wide range of activities. The school has maintained its excellent provision for personal development.
12. The provision for girls' spiritual development is excellent. In lessons, spiritual development is seen in science when girls achieve a sense of wonder as they study astronomy, atomic structure and the living world, and the importance of mood, feelings and style is affirmed in music, art and design, and design and technology. English and drama, in particular, excel at bringing out the spiritual and human dimension of the texts and plays that pupils are studying. Regular whole-school and key stage assemblies support the religious ethos of the school; girls are involved in preparing liturgies and leading prayers, and participate in high quality retreats, which provide valuable opportunities for reflection. The work of the school chaplain contributes sensitively to the provision of spiritual development. The chapel is used for regular masses for class and year groups.
13. Moral education is excellent. The school helps pupils to feel valued and to accept the ideas and values of others. Moral development is fostered well, with high expectations, consistent guidance and examples from adults about the principles of right and wrong. Girls know what is expected of them. As a result, most have a well-developed sense of right and wrong, which is consistently reinforced through adult intervention and reference to the spiritual values of the school ethos. Parents commented that the very strong Christian ethos encourages mutual care and respect. Values such as courtesy, honesty, fairness and respect for people, property and the environment are effectively promoted. There are opportunities for girls to support charities in practical ways. In lessons seen, the subjects that gave attention to spiritual development also provided opportunities to develop an understanding of contemporary moral issues. Characters from literature, such as Macbeth, help girls examine moral dilemmas, and in science, they consider ethical issues such as the use of animals in experiments, genetic engineering and environmental issues.
14. Girls' social development is excellent. Very good relationships between staff and girls and among girls make a positive contribution to learning. In virtually all classes, girls work together well, and in English, art and design and drama they support each other very well, and critically comment on each other's work. They listen respectfully as others present the findings of small-group discussions. They develop a strong sense of responsibility for living together in a community by raising large sums of money to support a wide range of charities, for instance. Assemblies celebrate the successes of all. Girls take responsibility very readily, acting as form captains, representing their peers on the school council and acting as hosts and guides on school open days, all of which provide very good opportunities for the enrichment of their social education.
15. Provision for cultural development is excellent. Assemblies often have multicultural dimensions. The school's ethos is warm, friendly and welcoming so that girls from all

ethnic backgrounds feel comfortable and valued. In drama, lessons encourage girls to appreciate the diversity of other peoples' cultural traditions. In art, pupils look at work from a variety of cultural backgrounds, and foreign exchange visits arranged by the languages department provide valuable opportunities to enhance girls' awareness of different cultures.

Sixth form

16. Students' excellent attitudes and behaviour play an important part in their very good progress in lessons. There have been no exclusions of students from the sixth form. Excellent relationships among students of all ethnic backgrounds and between staff and students create a very positive atmosphere for learning. Very high attendance ensures very good continuity and progression in learning.
17. Attitudes to the school are excellent. Students study very hard and are keen to take an active part in the life of the school and the wider community. They are very willing and confident to assume high levels of responsibility. As 'guardian angels', for example, they work very diligently and conscientiously as mentors to girls in the main school and help with the literacy hour in local junior schools. Many qualify for the Community Sports Leaders Award and help younger pupils in the school to develop their skills in a range of sports. They participate very actively in a wide range of activities, including fundraising for charity, community service and supervising girls in the main school at lunchtimes. Students enter into these roles in a conscientious manner and take their duties seriously.
18. The excellent behaviour of sixth formers plays an important part in their very good progress in lessons. They are polite and courteous and provide very good role models for younger girls. The excellent provision for the spiritual, social, moral and cultural development of students continues in Years 12 and 13. Students make a very important contribution to the school's excellent ethos. They help to raise substantial funds to support a range of charities and have a real concern for those less fortunate than themselves.
19. Attendance in the sixth form is very good. Overall, the retention rate on courses in the sixth form is very good, with very few students leaving their courses prematurely.

QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED BY THE SCHOOL

The quality of education provided by the school is outstanding. Teaching, learning and pastoral care are all excellent. The curriculum is very good.

Teaching and learning

Teaching and learning are excellent throughout the school, and particularly in Year 7, where 17 out of 20 lessons seen were very good or better and one quarter was excellent. Teachers have first-rate expertise, commitment, love of their subject and ambition for the success of their pupils, which enables them to make excellent progress in learning.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teachers' excellent expertise, commitment and love of their subjects are reflected in their methods.

- Girls' excellent capacity for individual study and research greatly assists their learning.
- Rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning result in high standards.
- The pace of learning is phenomenally quick in lessons, and followed up by homework.

Commentary

20. Teaching and learning are excellent. Nearly three-quarters of all lessons seen were very good or better and almost one quarter was excellent. Work samples showed that this quality of teaching is consistent. Teachers ensure that their pupils make an excellent start in the school. Eighty-five per cent of all lessons seen in Year 7 were very good or excellent, and because of this, girls' achievement is similarly high. Teaching has improved greatly since the previous inspection.

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection in 157 lessons

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very poor
36 (23%)	77 (49%)	37 (23.5%)	6 (4%)	1 (0.5%)	0	0

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

21. Teachers have excellent subject expertise; several are well known outside the school for writing text books or as advanced skills teachers. Many staff have been in the school for a long time, but there is no air of complacency. Instead, there is an unremitting determination to raise standards further because of the need to maintain the school's position in competition with other selective schools in the borough. Girls are also competitive and want to succeed. This combination results in them being engrossed in their work during lessons, finding it difficult to stop, and making excellent progress in examinations, where the rising trend is above that attained nationally. Most teachers make very good use of challenging questions, which enables girls to show that they are acquiring knowledge, understanding and skills at a much higher than average level. The high standard of spoken English underpins all learning and enables every girl to understand advanced texts, such as Shakespeare plays, from an early age, despite the fact that many speak English as their second language.
22. Most girls have a strong competitive streak and their capacity for individual study and research is developed very well by their teachers, who have very high expectations and challenge their pupils to produce work of the highest standard. This is seen in GCSE coursework; some for the physics component of science, for example, shows standards which would not be out of place at A-level. Girls' outstanding mathematical skills underpin investigations of electrical resistance where gradients of graphs are deduced.
23. A wide range of strategies is employed in every department to meet the needs of the many gifted and talented pupils. In music, drama and physical education, pupils have very good opportunities to perform with others, and have good role models in their teachers. In history, there are excellent opportunities for discussion and pupils have opportunities to choose their mode of working or presentation. In English, art and modern foreign languages, there are opportunities for pupils to complete extension work.

24. Teachers' methods are reflective of their own enthusiasm and excitement for their subjects, and their desire to pass this on to their pupils. Early German lessons, for example, are conducted only in German and girls' enthusiasm matches that of their teacher as they strive to match the pace as words are quickly introduced and repeated. Methods are based on teachers' extensive knowledge of how best to teach their subject and how pupils of this ability learn best. In many cases, this is the result of long experience, but teachers are not afraid to take on new methods, often suggested by the rigorous monitoring and evaluation which take place in the school. This has been responsible for the very good improvement in teaching since the previous inspection. As a result, teachers select their methods carefully and use time very productively for independent and collaborative work. Relationships in the classroom are excellent, and teachers very often inspire their pupils by teaching difficult concepts in stimulating and very effective ways. A class of Year 9 girls learning French, for example, was successfully encouraged to work out for themselves how to express future intentions, both positive and negative, through the use of two songs. The teacher's contagious vitality inspired girls and led to rapid learning.
25. Another outcome of rigorous monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is that planning is consistent throughout the school. Teachers have taken good notice of new initiatives, such as the National Strategy for Learning at Key Stage 3, and now plan for a three-part lesson. They are also making good use of the new ICT facilities, for example to present lessons via their laptop computers, and this motivates and meets expectations of the girls, who all have sufficient competence and confidence in using ICT as a tool to enhance their own work. This development has, however, been hampered by lack of funding from outside and frustrated by the delivery of faulty equipment.
26. All lessons proceed at a very fast pace and the rate of learning is phenomenally quick. Lessons are short and, because of travelling distances from one specialist area to another, rarely start on time. This does have a slightly detrimental effect on learning since teachers do not always have time to finish their plenary sessions and often continue teaching after the bell. This does not prevent girls from summarising lesson outcomes, however, as they do this afterwards and spend their own time very profitably on individual research to enhance their learning.
27. Homework is expected by all teachers in the school and results in some excellent projects, showing girls' very wide range of skills and talents. Some examples seen were the production of programmes to illustrate Shakespeare plays, coursework for food technology and science, and a tourist brochure advertising a trip to Borneo. All were characterised by extensive research and very good understanding of the use of ICT to produce eye-catching material, and were produced by girls of all ages.
28. Procedures for assessing and monitoring pupils' progress are very good. In all subjects, work is marked regularly according to the whole-school policy, with subject leaders having some discretion in designing their own interpretation of it. Constructive and helpful comments are given to help girls improve in all subjects; these were observed to be particularly effective in art, citizenship, design and technology, geography, Latin, music, physical education and science. In English, history and modern foreign languages, marking increases in depth and effectiveness from Year 9 to Year 10. Very good use is made of minimum target grades and all girls are generally aware of their progress towards reaching these. They are involved in helping to assess their own work in most subjects.

Sixth form

29. Teaching and learning in the sixth form are also excellent overall. No lesson was seen that was less than good and a similar proportion of very good and excellent lessons was seen as in the main school. The same teachers in general take the sixth form. Their subject expertise is excellent; they are all very well qualified. Difficult concepts are taught in an inspiring way. In an excellent biology lesson, for example, students learned a great deal about the properties of chlorophyll and its role in photosynthesis. The teacher's inspired analogy for the chlorophyll molecule, as resembling a solar panel, enabled its role in the absorption of some light frequencies to be readily understood by the students. There is a very close relationship between classroom activities and private study. Students are all encouraged to do their own research and to evaluate their work very early on in their time as sixth formers. For many, this follows on smoothly from their experiences in Years 10 and 11 in the main school, but for newcomers, teachers often find it necessary to support learning initially through booster classes and individual tutorials, which bring students up to similar levels and make class teaching more productive.
30. Technical support for teaching, given by laboratory and other practical technicians, makes an excellent contribution to learning at this level where, for example, students do practical physics past papers weekly. The use of outside speakers, conferences, university courses and work experience placements also makes an exceptional contribution to learning. All students studying modern foreign languages, for example, go to work placements in Europe, which also involves a research project on the district visited.
31. Procedures for assessing students' work are very good overall particularly in art, design and technology, English, geography and history. Homework is set regularly and is constructively marked with helpful comments. Assessment results are used in planning a student's programme of study and in the setting of realistic targets. Information about students' progress and improvement needs is shared regularly with parents.

The curriculum

The curriculum is very good. It meets statutory requirements and provides a broad range of worthwhile opportunities.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The school provides a very good range of curricular opportunities.
- The programme of visits and other curriculum enrichment is excellent.
- The curriculum is regularly reviewed and kept up to date.

Commentary

32. The school provides a very good range of curricular opportunities, which are carefully and regularly reviewed by the school's senior managers and the governing body. In Years 7 to 9 all the subjects of the National Curriculum are taught together with religious education and drama. Additionally, from this year, pupils in Year 7 have the opportunity to sample three modern languages as well as French. This is designed to help them decide upon their second language for Year 8 study when Latin also

begins. In Years 9 to 11, pupils can then study three languages. Across Years 7 to 9 there is a shortage of curriculum time for physical education.

33. In Years 10 and 11 the school has taken advantage of the increased flexibility of the National Curriculum to provide a very wide range of courses, with each pupil studying 11 GCSEs. In design and technology, for example, three specialisms are offered at GCSE, and a course in dance has been provided in physical education in response to pupils' request. In science, a course leading to a double award is followed but girls are not able to study single sciences, which results in a relatively low entry point for those who study A-level. In ICT, the curriculum for the two-thirds of pupils who do not follow the GCSE course is not yet coherently planned across all subjects. Curricular provision for citizenship is well established.
34. Opportunities for enrichment are excellent throughout the school. Support for learning outside the school day is excellent. Most departments provide additional support through extra revision classes, and several organise visits to revision conferences. Gifted and talented young mathematicians go on advanced courses at the Royal Institute and enter competitions. Pupils can use facilities, such as the library and ICT room, during lunchtimes and after school. There is an excellent range of extra-curricular activities, particularly in music. Pupils in the choir and teachers participate very enthusiastically, using new multimedia facilities effectively; the choir sings regularly within the Diocese. Pupils achieve highly in the school orchestra and choir. Educational visits are arranged in most subjects, both at home and abroad, such as sixth form visits to art galleries. Participation in sport is good, but opportunities for those not in teams are limited. Drama is strong: many girls took part in the recent school production of 'Bugsy Malone' and frequently visit theatres. Pupils raise money for charities and the disadvantaged, and, in the sixth form, most carry out voluntary service such as visiting a local hospice. Activities related to work or citizenship, such as visits to law courts, industry days and Young Enterprise clubs, are well developed.
35. The provision for pupils who are gifted and talented is very good. The school recognises that as a selective school it has to respond, within its narrow ability range, to the needs of individual pupils. All pupils are considered to be gifted and talented, and all have access to the wide range of opportunities which are available to them. Pupils who have particular gifts in languages, music, dance and drama benefit from the wide range of courses available for GCSE and A-level. They choose freely and the school goes to great lengths to match the pupils' choices. The opportunities in the sixth form are enhanced further by the collaborative arrangements with other schools. A twilight GCSE business course is run in Year 10 by Finchley Catholic High School to enhance the programme available for the gifted and talented. Such pupils benefit from the rich extra-curricular life of the school, and from the wide range of educational visits which are available. A number of older pupils share their talents with younger pupils by organising clubs and societies.
36. The accommodation supports curricular requirements well in nearly all subjects and represents a significant improvement since the last inspection, particularly in the mathematics accommodation. However, it is inadequate for physical education and restricts the range of learning activities in this subject. Plans to improve this accommodation are under consideration and include the provision of a new sports hall and enlargement of the drama area. Very good provision for design and technology and ICT in the main school and excellent provision for ICT in the sixth form help to promote interest and high standards in these subjects. The school has a Disability

Access Plan in place and, whilst funding has been identified for some aspects of the plan, additional funding has still to be identified.

37. Resources for teaching and learning meet curricular needs well and have improved since the last inspection when they were judged adequate. Learning resources are good in English, mathematics, science, art, citizenship and ICT and have a positive impact on teaching and learning. In all other subjects they are satisfactory, except in physical education where resources are very limited and restrict learning. The library provision has improved since the last inspection: accommodation is now satisfactory, there are twelve computers, a careers library, a supply of daily newspapers and a wide range of fiction and non-fiction books. However, many books are dated and in need of replacement.

Care, guidance and support

Pastoral care is excellent. The school has a very friendly and welcoming environment in which girls feel happy and secure. This enables them to achieve very well academically and to enhance their all-round, personal development. Girls receive excellent academic and personal support. The school's pastoral system is very well organised and has a positive effect on girls' learning.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Girls receive excellent support and guidance from staff.
- Excellent procedures for induction help girls to settle quickly into the school.
- A few aspects of the management of health and safety are not as effective as they should be.
- Advice and guidance for university entrance are very good.

Commentary

38. The school's pastoral system is very well organised and supports the welfare of girls of all backgrounds. Relationships between staff and pupils are excellent. Every girl has the opportunity to have a trusting relationship with one or more adults in the school. Older girls act sensitively as peer mentors; all Year 7 pupils have older girls as mentors, who help them to settle in well and provide them with very good advice and support as and when they need it. Tutors and heads of key stages help girls very well. Staff and pupils know one another very well and interact well both inside and outside the classroom. Although a significant number of girls indicated in the pre-inspection questionnaires that they did not think that there was an adult in school with whom they could confide, they said verbally that they feel confident about approaching teachers should any problems of a personal nature arise, in the safe knowledge that appropriate support and guidance would be forthcoming. Tutors and heads of key stages have regular meetings to discuss girls' academic and personal progress and to take appropriate action to support girls as necessary. The provision for pastoral care is further enhanced by the drop-in facility provided by the school chaplain and support from the school officer.
39. The school is committed to providing a safe working environment for staff and pupils. The health and safety policy meets statutory requirements. However, a few aspects of the management of health and safety are not as effective as they should be and were

brought to the attention of the headteacher during the inspection. First-aid provision is good. There are sufficient qualified first-aiders and the school keeps good records of accidents and injuries. Arrangements for risk assessment for educational trips and visits are good. Overall, arrangements for child protection are satisfactory. The headteacher is the designated officer and has received appropriate training. The school follows the local child protection procedures and has its own specific policy. However, the training of other staff could be improved.

40. Excellent procedures help girls to settle quickly into the school, even though they come from as many as 100 different primary schools. Parents receive very good information and guidance about these procedures and how they can help to prepare their daughters for life at this school. Parents and pupils visit the school and meet with the girls' tutors and peer mentors prior to admission. Year 7 girls said they found the family barbeque with the then Year 7 girls and form tutors prior to starting school provided very good opportunities to make friends and get to know their tutors.
41. The school has very good procedures for seeking girls' views of the school, mainly through school councils, discussion time in lessons and pupil questionnaires to seek girls' views on bullying, for example. It values these views and, whenever practicable, takes them fully into consideration when reviewing policies and procedures.
42. The progress of gifted and talented pupils throughout the school is rigorously monitored. Gifted and talented girls are encouraged and supported in their university applications, which included nine successful Oxbridge applications this year. The school's pastoral staff employ a range of very effective strategies to support those girls who may have special educational needs as they approach examination courses. The school's ethos of achievement encourages the gifted and talented pupils to excel in their work and aspire to a headteacher's commendation.

Sixth form

43. The quality of advice, guidance and support for students in the sixth form is excellent. During Year 11, girls receive useful information and guidance about opportunities for continuing their education post-16, primarily from the head of the sixth form, who works closely with the head of careers, and girls have an interview with a careers adviser. At open evenings, parents and girls look at predicted GCSE results, consider future career ambitions and discuss with teachers the appropriate courses to match these ambitions. In discussions, students indicated that the advice and guidance they received before entry to the sixth form were helpful and appropriate.
44. Procedures for students' induction into the sixth form are good and help them to settle in quickly to their new courses. Students are assigned to tutor groups. The form tutor stays with the same group throughout Years 12 and 13 and is available at convenient times to give advice and guidance on academic or personal problems, on a confidential basis if necessary. Early in their first term students have extended tutorials during which they receive specific guidance in study skills to assist them in their learning. The very high level of pastoral support enables them to concentrate well on their studies.
45. Students receive very good quality academic support. In most subjects, work is assessed quickly and constructive comments provide good guidance on how to improve. Students meet their tutors regularly; they value these sessions where their

attainment is discussed as well as matters affecting personal development. Tutors maintain comprehensive records of students' academic and personal development that are used to set targets for future development. The programme of advice and guidance relating to university entrance is very well planned and provides useful information and help for students. Students have good access to a wide range of guidance materials in the careers library.

Partnership with parents, other schools and the community

The school has developed a very strong partnership with parents. The quality and range of information provided for parents are good. Overall, parents have very positive views of the school and a significant number are actively involved in the life of the school. The school has developed very good links with the community. There are very good links with other schools and colleges.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Parents have a very high opinion of the school.
- The school has established strong links with parents that make a positive contribution to pupils' learning.
- The involvement of the school in the community and the links with other schools and colleges are very good.

Commentary

46. The school has established a very good partnership with parents that has been maintained since the previous inspection. Views expressed in the parents' questionnaires, in letters completed for the inspection and at the parents' meeting were very positive about the quality of education provided by the school. Parents are pleased with the progress their daughters make, the quality of teaching and the expectation that their children will work hard. Parents also indicated that their daughters enjoyed coming to school, that the school is helping their children to become more mature and responsible and that school is well led and managed well. The findings of the inspection support these positive views.
47. The quality of information given to parents is very good. The school prospectus and annual governors' report provide a wide range of information about the school and its activities and meet statutory requirements. Regular newsletters and letters about specific events keep parents up to date about current school activities. The homework record provides parents with a very effective means of communication between home and school. Attendance at the meetings to discuss girls' progress is very high and reflects parents' very keen interest in their children's education. Overall, girls' annual reports are of good quality. They give clear but brief guidance on girls' attainment and progress and provide targets for improvement. The school actively seeks the views of parents, and takes account of these when determining or revising its policies and procedures.
48. Parents' involvement in their daughters' learning is very good. They support them at home and provide substantial financial assistance to the school that has a very positive effect on the provision of learning resources and materials. A small number of parents assist in school, helping in the library and supporting musical productions. The active parents' association organises many social and fund-raising events. It raises

large amounts of money to improve the accommodation and to finance additional learning resources.

49. Links with the local and wider community are very good. Through these links come many learning opportunities, including work experience placements for girls in Year 10, speakers to support general studies, and the police involvement in the pastoral and tutorial programme. Visits to museums and Greenwich Observatory support girls' learning in art and science. Local field trips promote learning in history and geography, whilst visits to theatres and art galleries enrich and extend learning in English, art, design and drama. The sixth form community service programme involves students in a range of voluntary activities in the local community that enhances their personal development.
50. Links with other schools and colleges are very good in the main school and excellent in the sixth form. The collaboration with the partner school is highly effective. Links with local primary schools provide work experience placements and enable Year 12 students to be involved in the Reader Helpers Scheme: these links are of mutual benefit to all. Links with higher education establishments are excellent and make a significant contribution to the sixth form curriculum. They provide speakers to talk to students about opportunities in higher education, admissions procedures and practice interviews.

LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT

Leadership and management are excellent. The subject heads of department and pastoral heads are very good overall, and there is a high proportion of excellent provision. The management structure works very well, particularly for continuity of assessment and monitoring of progress. Governance is very good.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The headteacher gives outstanding leadership, with excellent support from her deputy.
- The senior management team, subject leaders and governing body give very good support.
- Self-evaluation is excellent; performance management and staff development are very strong.
- The school achieves best value for its low funding but has as yet been unable to secure external funding for its badly needed new sports accommodation.

Commentary

51. Leadership and management by the headteacher and her deputy are excellent, and very well supported by the senior management team and subject leaders. The school is under the same leadership as it was at the previous inspection and this has been responsible for very good improvement since then. Standards have continued to rise to a very high level, teaching and learning have improved greatly and the sixth form has grown into a major strength of the school.
52. The headteacher has superb leadership qualities with clear vision for future development which are complemented by the qualities of the deputy head, who gives excellent support. Together, they lead the school with a strong sense of purpose and very high aspirations. The senior management team, comprising the three heads of

key stage, work very hard in these roles. This management structure works very well in both academic and pastoral matters and brings unity to the two by ensuring, for example, that academic monitoring of girls' performance is complementary and, therefore, very effective. Heads of subject departments all make a contribution to the very good overall leadership of subjects; all departments are well run and in several, the leadership and management are excellent.

53. There is a relentless drive by all leaders to maintain and improve the school's very high standards. Leaders of the curriculum and pastoral matters provide very good role models, creating very effective teams which they inspire and motivate through shared love of education. The school has a deservedly high reputation locally, which is valued by staff and girls alike, and both work hard to maintain it. In its excellent self-evaluation, the school is keen to learn from best practice elsewhere. Senior managers regularly attend courses and conferences. The headteacher is much respected locally and her management role extends beyond the school through the secondary heads' association and through mentoring new headteachers.
54. The school's development plan is an excellent document, which fully reflects the school's ambitions and goals within its Roman Catholic ethos. The rigorous annual process of self-review carried out by departments involves evaluation of all aspects of provision. Teaching and learning are observed by the heads of department and the senior management team, over and above performance management requirements. As well as classroom observations, work sampling and scrutiny of assessments contribute to ensure the quality of teaching is good enough to enable the school's very high standards to be maintained. The success of this rigorous evaluation of classroom practice was seen in the excellent teaching observed in this inspection. Self-evaluation has identified the shortcomings in ICT provision for some subjects, caused by faulty equipment being delivered, and the school is remedying those.
55. Management is excellent. Many of the school's management techniques have been used as a model by other schools, for example its lesson observation criteria, its sixth form monitoring of achievement, and its general religious education course for the sixth form. Management structure, centring as it does on the heads of key stage rather than year heads, is unusual, but works very well, especially for continuity through the key stages. Several Roman Catholic schools have now adopted this structure. A particular benefit is continuity of management for pastoral and academic monitoring throughout a whole key stage. The school collects a large quantity of data which is analysed to give very clear insight into pupils' progress within and across key stages. The school rigorously analyses the performance of all ethnic groups and can show that all achieve just as well as each other. It uses data to set higher targets for continual improvement.
56. The support for individual pupils is very effectively managed by the heads of key stage. There is a strong commitment from senior managers to the vision that the needs of individual pupils should be identified and met. Frequent pastoral meetings effectively do this and the school gives tutors time with pupils to discuss and plan for progress.
57. The school is active in developing the talents of its own staff and has a shadow management structure for its senior management team to enable other staff to gain experience. It provides excellent induction and mentoring procedures for new staff at all levels, and this enables its high standards to be maintained. The arrangements for

the professional development of staff are very good. Whilst all requests for training are considered on their merits, the principle is that training should be seen as addressing either a whole-school need, as identified in the school development plan, or an individual need, identified during the performance management process. When it is a school need, then staff are expected to communicate their new knowledge with colleagues and to evaluate the effectiveness of their training. However, central monitoring to determine the impact of training on improved teaching and achievement is not as well advanced.

58. All management systems are flexible enough to allow for the unexpected, such as serious illness, fluctuation in sixth form numbers, or severe under-funding as occurred last year. External views on management have led to the adoption of the school's system in many cases, for example the Beginning Teacher and the Graduate Teacher Programmes.
59. The operation of performance management at St.Michael's is outstanding. It is thoroughly embedded in the school and is seen as an opportunity to review performance rigorously against agreed targets, school and subject outcomes and to consider further professional development as well as pupil advancement. Excellent practice exists throughout because individual reviews and targets are measured against the school development plan and that developed in individual subject areas. Monitoring is fully developed since it is firstly in the hands of line managers, overseen by the senior managers and ultimately the headteacher. All applications to cross the threshold have been upheld – a reflection of the high standards set for and by the staff and the results obtained by the pupils. Performance management is making a significant contribution to delivering the aims of the school whilst at the same time celebrating the outcomes and success with those central to making it happen.
60. Governance is very good. The school's governing body is experienced and long-serving; governors play an excellent role in maintaining the Roman Catholic ethos of the school. They manage the balance between its function as a selective grammar school and that due to its religious nature extremely well. They expect the highest standards and constantly challenge the school to do better. They know it well and have a very good idea of its strengths and weaknesses. They ensure that statutory requirements are met. However, checking outcomes of risk assessment occurs too infrequently.
61. The school has been poorly funded until the current year when it has received more money for its much enlarged sixth form. Parents, girls and the school caretaker took it upon themselves to raise money for essentials, showing their high esteem for the school. Its present funding is still quite low for a London school, however. In some subjects, girls have to buy textbooks, and the school's ICT facilities have received low external funding, which makes it difficult for ICT to be used sufficiently in all subjects by just relying on school resources. Although it has managed through the creative use of a trust fund to improve its accommodation since the previous inspection, it has still insufficient funding to replace its poor facilities for physical education and sport, which restricts the curriculum it can offer.

Financial information for the year April 2003 to March 2004

Income and expenditure (£)	Balances (£)
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Total income	2,400,330
Total expenditure	2,363,860
Expenditure per pupil	3,288

Balance from previous year	16,199
Balance carried forward to the next year	36,470

62. The governing body and the deputy head control funding wisely and seek best value in all aspects of the school's work to raise standards. The school's very high standards, achievement, teaching, learning, leadership and management are excellent value for money.

Sixth form

63. There is no head of sixth form at present, but an appointment has been made for the start of the next academic year. The acting head of sixth is doing a very good job in day-to-day management and also has a clear involvement in the fuller development of the sixth form because of her membership of the senior management team.
64. The headteacher and her deputy have developed the sixth form since the headteacher's appointment and have successfully established its collaboration with Finchley Catholic High School (FCHS). The sixth form is a great strength which has grown and improved tremendously since the previous inspection. The headteacher and deputy head retain overall control and persistently focus on improved standards in all aspects. They saw Curriculum 2000 as a significant opportunity to move forward; there are now 30 subjects on offer through the collaboration with FCHS and the sixth form is increasingly over-subscribed since nearly all the school's Year 11 girls stay on.
65. The governors have agreed to a multi-faith sixth form, which is inclusive; all students follow a general religious education programme, for example. They have refused to increase GCSE requirements for five grade Bs to five grade As merely to improve standards; they have very high expectations of the sixth form which are realised in the improving and currently very high standards.

WORK-RELATED LEARNING

66. Provision for work-related learning is very good. Opportunities for girls to engage in work-related activities are very good. For many it is built into their subject learning, although this is not consistent across all departments. This is supplemented by pastoral programmes and work experience in Years 10, 12 and 13. The well-established work experience programme runs successfully and preparation for this involves CV writing, interview techniques, assertiveness, dress sense, health and safety and equal opportunities. Most of the preparation for work experience is undertaken by the form tutors during tutorial sessions. The school works with Connexions which runs sessions for both groups and individuals on career paths.
67. For girls aged 11 to 14, work-related activities are taught through the tutorial programme. Girls aged 15 arrange their own placements, and very few need assistance. This reflects very well on their own initiative and the support of parents and local employers. A wide variety of placements was undertaken in 2004 including the House of Commons, Cancer Research UK, Watford General Hospital and veterinary surgeries. Sixth form work experience is focused on environments that they

hope will relate to an eventual career choice. Over 85 per cent of girls in their last year at the school took up this opportunity in 2004. Local primary schools also appreciate help from older girls who are part of the reading helpers scheme. A work experience working party tutors and supports groups or individual pupils experiencing difficulties.

68. St. Michael's joined other Barnet schools to deliver the International Award accredited by the University of the West of England. Twenty girls successfully carried out a European work placement in France, Belgium or Sweden, followed by a week completing a number of research projects linked to the city they were visiting. The award focuses on the key skills of communication, problem solving and information technology. All students have this opportunity.
69. Achievement is very good because girls gain confidence and an increased understanding of work-related issues from the various aspects of the well constructed programme. Leadership and management are very good, with a high level of commitment from all staff involved.

LANGUAGE PROVISION

70. The provision for modern foreign languages in the curriculum is very good. Girls study French as their first foreign language from Year 7 to 9. During Year 7 they have taster courses of German, Spanish and Italian, and they may select one of those languages in Year 8 when they also begin Latin. In Year 9 they may study two languages and continue with Latin as well. The carousel of languages in Year 7 was introduced in September 2004, and at the end of the year most girls were able to continue with the language of their first choice.
71. In Years 10 and 11 girls have to continue to study at least one modern foreign language. They are also given the chance to take up Italian. Under half of the girls study two languages in the current Year 10 but this is nearly three times more than in Year 11. One girl studies three modern foreign languages. Spanish is very popular, resulting in two classes of unequal size. Italian is growing in popularity. German has had a small uptake but this seems likely to increase with new staffing.
72. In the sixth form the four languages can be studied to AS and A-level. Spanish and French have larger groups in Year 12, of 13 or 14 students, and Italian and German smaller with five and two respectively. In Year 13 many students do not continue and no group is currently larger than six students. There is also the possibility of boys joining the groups from Finchley Catholic High School.
73. The approach to language teaching is very positive. Most teachers are able to teach two languages and use examples from other languages to assist learning in their classrooms. The curriculum is enhanced by foreign exchange visits, and sixth formers studying languages have European work experience.
74. Within the classics department, Latin is taught at GCSE and A-level, and classical civilisation at A-level. Numbers in both Latin and classical civilisation have risen over the last two years; 55 per cent of pupils choose to continue Latin into Year 9 and there are now two GCSE groups in Year 10. At sixth form level numbers in Year 12 have grown and there are now 12 pupils studying Latin and 18 studying classical civilisation. Results in both subjects and at all levels are well above the national average and some girls go on to higher education to further their study of the ancient world. There

have been limited opportunities for extra-curricular activities but the department is currently planning a visit to Greece and day visits for each year group to support their topics of study. Sixth form girls have the opportunity to attend Greek and Latin summer schools, which they have found a very good enrichment for their studies.

PART C: THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN SUBJECTS AND COURSES

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH, LATIN AND MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

English

Provision in English is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Excellent leadership and very good management are driving up achievement.
- Standards in Year 9 National Curriculum tests and at GCSE are very high.
- Teaching and learning are very good.
- Girls have very positive attitudes and a high level of commitment.
- Improvement since the previous inspection is very good.

Commentary

75. Standards in Year 9 National Curriculum tests are consistently very high. Standards at GCSE are also very high, in both language and literature. More than four out of every five pupils regularly gain grades A* or A in these examinations.
76. The standards of work seen were very high, particularly in speaking and listening. This is all the more remarkable because of the wide ethnic mix, including bilingual pupils of European origin. Most girls in all years speak very confidently about a wide range of topical issues as well as the texts they are studying. They clearly explain and justify their opinions, but are also prepared to modify them as a result of group or class discussions. Reading skills are also very well developed. There are many opportunities for girls to practise their deductive and inferential skills in lessons; their awareness of the power of language to move and persuade is most impressive by the end of Year 11.
77. In Years 8 and 9, pupils are reading and enjoying challenging texts, such as *Roll of Thunder, Hear My Cry* and *Jane Eyre*, which are normally studied for GCSE at other schools. Narrative writing is excellent in all years. It is lively, often original, and shows the flair and creativity of girls who have a wide vocabulary and use figurative language naturally and confidently to enrich their descriptions and entertain their readers. Writing about literature is also of a very high standard. By the end of Year 9, girls already have a strong critical awareness and most synthesise their commentaries and appropriate quotations seamlessly into their essays. Writing to inform and explain is very good but not quite so strong, especially in Years 7 and 8, though many of these girls make superb use of their excellent computer skills to produce remarkable extended projects, such as those on Shakespeare, his writing and his times.
78. Girls of all capabilities and ethnic backgrounds achieve very well in all years. This impressive achievement is aided considerably by their very positive attitudes and enthusiasm, as well as the motivation provided by their teachers. Additionally, the very good curriculum provides regular library and drama lessons in Years 7 to 9 and a growing range of ICT activities. All girls take both language and literature at GCSE,

courses which include the study of media and multicultural literature. Considerable enrichment is provided by such activities as regular theatre trips, visiting writers, book fairs, poetry writing and public speaking competitions. Booster and support classes ensure that those girls who are not amongst the highest attainers and who require additional help also achieve very well.

79. Teaching and learning are very good overall. They are sometimes excellent because all teachers have very good subject knowledge, high expectations of pupils' behaviour and work and use a wide range of teaching methods. Teaching is lively and stimulating and encourages girls to make their own decisions, to be inquisitive and independent. Although some teachers do not yet make effective use of national test level descriptors when planning their lessons, the department is beginning to pay much greater attention to the skills which are to be developed in lessons, rather than to their content. This concentration on skills is helping girls to improve their reading and textual analyses, as well as the structure and technical accuracy of their writing. Assessment and marking are good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11, where marking clearly shows girls exactly what they must do to improve; a good emphasis is placed on their self-evaluation in all years. All teachers are now starting to use interactive whiteboards to involve girls even more in their own learning.
80. The leadership of the department is excellent. There is ambition, commitment and vision and a shared love of the subject from the newest to the longest serving teacher. Management is very good. The whole team is working very hard to improve standards even further and to ensure that each pupil achieves her maximum potential. Responsibilities are appropriately delegated, new staff well supported, teaching and marking regularly monitored and needs and priorities carefully identified.
81. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good. Standards in Year 9 tests and at GCSE are consistently very high. Achievement is now very good because teaching and learning are also very good, and assessment processes are applied consistently across the department.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

82. Provision for the development of literacy across the curriculum is very good. Standards are very high in all years. Speaking and listening are particularly strong because girls' mature attitudes and behaviour enable them to be given frequent opportunities in all subjects to work together to solve problems, to evaluate, to debate and make decisions and to develop and refine their ideas. Reading comprehension is also of a very high standard because teachers stress the importance of these skills as well as reading for information. Reading for pleasure is well promoted by the English department and library, especially in Years 7 and 8. Standards of writing are also very high.
83. Pupils' literacy is well above average when they enter the school, even though many speak English as their second language. They achieve very well in all years. Achievement is best in subjects where teachers regularly identify and address all girls' literacy needs, and the skills to be practised and developed, in their lesson planning.
84. The teaching of literacy is very good overall and there is excellent practice in several subjects. Inspectors saw the implementation of the National Literacy Strategy, in which learning objectives are clearly stated and planning reflects a three- or four-part

lesson structure, in many lessons. However, opportunities for girls to reflect on their learning, both during and, particularly, at the end of lessons, are not always taken, or too little time is given to them. Girls take a pride in the accuracy and presentation of their work and teachers ensure that it is thorough and well constructed. They teach note-taking and summary skills and girls are encouraged to respond creatively in all subjects through, for example, stories, letters, presentations or diaries.

85. Literacy is very well managed by its co-ordinator and the heads of departments. All teachers see themselves as teachers of literacy, and it is very well integrated into the new citizenship programme. However, there is no regular forum for the sharing of the many examples of excellent practice which exist across the school.

Modern foreign languages

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good overall.
- The results in Year 9 assessments and GCSE are well above national averages.
- After Year 7, a choice of languages is available.
- Many opportunities for visits abroad are provided.
- The schemes of work do not reflect current practice.
- Girls are not regularly required to speak at length in the foreign language in class.

Commentary

86. National Curriculum test results for girls aged 14 were well above national expectation in 2004. GCSE results were outstanding, with nearly three-quarters of the entries graded A* or A. All the girls who took GCSE Italian gained top grades, as did just under two-thirds of those who did French and German. In Spanish almost all those entered attained these grades, an increase from the previous year. French had fewer top grades in 2004 than in 2003.
87. In Years 7 to 9, the standard of work seen was well above average. In Year 7, girls listened in French to a weather forecast for cities in France and made notes successfully. In Year 8, girls took part in role-plays in Spanish to order drinks and snacks. Year 9 girls prepared in class extended writing about a past holiday which was to be completed for homework. In Years 10 and 11 the standard of work seen was also very good and sometimes excellent. Girls use more complex structures to express themselves and write quite accurately at length.
88. Girls achieve very well overall. Their achievement develops as they grow in confidence to use the foreign languages. Teachers know their pupils well and provide extra support and encouragement where this is needed. Girls from ethnic minority groups achieve as well as others and additional reading and listening material is provided for those who are especially gifted and talented.

89. Teaching and learning are very good in each language and with each year group. Teachers are very competent in the languages which they teach and use them extensively throughout the lessons. Where excellent teaching and learning were observed, there was an infectious vitality which inspired girls and led to rapid learning. A class of Year 9 girls learning French was successfully encouraged to work out for themselves how to express future intentions, both positive and negative, through the use of two songs. A Year 10 German group moved rapidly from brainstorming the topic of shopping to speaking about their own spending habits and those of others. Lessons are planned very thoroughly with clear objectives and a variety of activities. The pace is challenging and there is often little time left at the end of the lesson to reflect on learning, which is left for homework. Frequent practice of rehearsed role-play and questioning in class strengthen confidence in oral work but girls are less frequently required to take the initiative in speaking and to speak at length in class. Regular assessment and marking of work are very effective and enable them to know how to improve their work. Homework tasks encourage the development of independent learning and are completed reliably.
90. Learning is further enhanced by the provision of a range of visits abroad. In Year 8, all girls take part in a trip to Normandy, for which there is a programme of cross-curricular activities. Older girls can take part in exchanges to Germany, France and Spain. There are displays of these visits and of girls' work in corridors and classrooms. Girls have the opportunity to practise speaking in small groups with the foreign language assistants.
91. The department is very well led and managed. There is clear vision for the future and the teachers work together effectively. The quality of their work is regularly monitored. Data are used to identify underachievement and the analysis of examination results guides planning. Schemes of work are in the process of revision; at present they do not reflect some of the excellent work which makes a valuable contribution to cross-curricular learning, especially citizenship and spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Some of the classrooms are small for the larger classes and there is no office for the department. A plan to replace older text books is in hand.
92. Since the previous inspection there has been very good progress. The importance of accurate pronunciation is stressed and ICT is used increasingly to consolidate learning in lessons and as homework. The use of interactive whiteboards is currently being developed. Girls choose their second foreign language at the end of Year 7 after a series of taster courses in Italian, Spanish and German, and in Year 10, Italian has also been made available.

Latin

Provision in Latin is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in GCSE Latin are well above the national average.
- Girls make very good progress as a result of the high expectations and challenging questions of their teachers.
- Oral and written advice to pupils is detailed and gives clear guidance on how to improve.
- The commitment and expertise of the subject leader and her team inspire pupils.

- Information and communication technology is not integrated fully into teaching through schemes of work.

Commentary

93. Standards at the end of Year 11 are well above the national average. In 2004, 80 per cent of girls achieved a grade of A* or A with the rest achieving B. These standards were reflected in the lessons and work seen and represent an improvement over the past two years. Girls in Years 8 and 9 attain very high standards. There are no national data for classical subjects below GCSE level and the judgement on standards is based exclusively on work seen during the inspection. Achievement is very good.
94. In Year 10, girls are developing their understanding of increasingly complex Latin grammar such as the use of the subjunctive, and, by Year 11, they have further refined and grasped new Latin syntax such as the ablative absolute. They have a very thorough understanding of literary devices and discuss the impact of techniques such as assonance and chiasmus in their set book, Virgil's *Aeneid* 2. In Years 8 and 9, girls make very swift progress through the early stages of the Cambridge Latin Course and by the end of Year 9, most translate a range of tenses, as well as the perfect passive participle. The very good relationships between girls and their teachers create an environment where all girls make very good progress.
95. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and teachers set high expectations and use challenging questions. There is a very good balance between moving forward at pace and consolidating knowledge; this leads to very good achievement and motivation amongst the girls. Written and oral assessment is frequent and the detailed, subject-specific teacher comments enable girls to improve upon each piece of work. There is a good level of out-of-class support and teachers provide very high quality guidance notes. In the very good and excellent lessons, teachers provide a wide range of creative and challenging activities which spark interest in and enthusiasm for the Roman world. However, a small minority of teacher-led lessons do not involve girls sufficiently in their learning, resulting in some girls losing concentration.
96. Leadership and management are very good. The subject leader has identified appropriate priorities for further development through her very thorough departmental self-evaluation. Effective monitoring and regular communication, including a weekly classics newsletter to staff, contribute to this clear vision for the future. Assessment is very good, regularly and consistently applied by all teachers. Girls know where they are in relation to GCSE standards and they regularly assess their own progress. There are currently limited extra curricular opportunities in Latin and, whilst ICT is used in some lessons, it is not integrated fully into teaching and schemes of work. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

MATHEMATICS

Provision in mathematics is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Girls show excellent attitudes to the subject and achieve very well.
- Teaching is very good, based on a very good curriculum.

- The department provides plentiful opportunities for enhancement through activity days, special activities and competitions.
- The mathematics leadership team has a very clear vision for mathematics that is shared by the department.

Commentary

97. In the 2003 National Curriculum tests for pupils in Year 9, standards at the school were very high, and in the top five per cent nationally. On average, pupils were about three years ahead of their peers nationally. There was a modest decline in 2004, although this is still significantly better than the national picture. GCSE results in 2004 were similarly high: the average grade gained was near the borderline of A and B. Six times as many pupils gained A* as did nationally, and the proportion gaining at least a grade C was nearly twice the national average. The work seen during the inspection, both in pupils' books and during lessons, confirms that standards throughout the school are very high.
98. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers have rigorous expectations of what girls will be able to do and challenge them consistently in lessons. Girls make significant gains in their knowledge, understanding and levels of skills during lessons and over time. A feature of many lessons was the emphasis placed upon developing understanding of mathematical concepts so that they can be transferred to other subjects and contexts. Consequently, achievement throughout the school is very good. However, occasionally opportunities are missed to extend the most able pupils in a class. Teachers include more challenging activities as extension exercises, but still expect all in a class to complete the more basic exercises when it may be more appropriate for the most capable to move directly to the more challenging work. The department has noted that it could make better use of short-term assessments to improve learning even further in lessons in its own development plan, and work is ongoing to make improvements within the context of already very good provision and achievement. Marking does not always help girls to know how well they are doing in the context of the National Curriculum, or what the next steps might be.
99. The schemes of work are thorough and support the very good progress because they are very well planned to ensure that pupils meet progressively harder concepts as they move through the school. However, they do not consistently include guidance on how to incorporate elements of spirituality or the rich cultural heritage of mathematics into lessons. Nevertheless, the curriculum is enriched considerably through the use of special mathematics days, external courses and competitions. Girls spoke of these with great excitement and showed a developing love for the subject.
100. Leadership is very good. Provision is driven by the extremely clear vision of the department's leadership team, shared by all staff. This vision of how mathematics should be taught and enjoyed permeates everything the department does, and is communicated to pupils who look forward to mathematics lessons with relish. The department is managed very well. Daily routines are consistently applied, and the data from assessments and external tests and examinations are rigorously analysed for any areas of potential weakness.
101. At the time of the last inspection, the quality of the department's accommodation was such that it interfered with learning and restricted the range of teaching styles that could be used. Rebuilding work has resulted in large, airy classrooms that are well

suited to teaching. Standards have been maintained at a very high level, and achievement has improved. Teaching is now better, and leadership has improved significantly. Overall, the department has made very good progress since the previous inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

102. Although there is no consistent policy for mathematics across the curriculum, provision is very good. Numeracy is not often identified in lesson planning in other subjects, but the high standards that girls attain in mathematics lessons stand them in good stead. The emphasis on understanding rather than rote-learning helps them to transfer skills learned in mathematics lessons to other subjects. In geography, for example, a wide range of graphs and charts is in use, as well as a thorough understanding of sampling methods evident in coursework. In science, girls' algebraic skills are utilised well in calculations and their skills of data handling and interpreting graphs promote good learning as they complete coursework tasks, as seen in some outstanding physics.

SCIENCE

Provision in science is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is very good in all years, girls responding with very good behaviour and a positive approach to the subject.
- The use of a variety of teaching approaches ensures a high level of interest in lessons and leads to very good learning.
- Standards are high and girls' achievement at the end of each key stage is excellent.
- Girls learn very effectively in most lessons, but there needs to be a consistent approach to stretching those of highest ability.

Commentary

103. GCSE double award science results in 2004 were very high compared to the national average. There was a small improvement in overall standards compared to the previous year and a substantial rise in the number of higher grades. Year 9 test results in both 2003 and 2004 were very high when compared to those in all schools and in line with results in similar schools. Average points scores have been consistently high over a number of years. The science department is working hard to increase the numbers achieving the highest levels and there is a very effective system of additional support available to help girls.

104. Current standards in Year 9 and Year 11 are well above average. Attainment on entry is below that expected for a grammar school. Girls settle quickly on entry into Year 7 and soon produce work of a high quality. Their ability to think scientifically is clearly evident, as seen in a Year 7 lesson where girls confidently discussed the movement of gaseous particles and gave very good explanations of the collapsing can experiment. Their enjoyment and interest in science are very apparent, demonstrated with a Year 8 class working in groups to devise and perform a role-play activity quickly to show how iron can be magnetised.

105. Achievement across Years 7 to 9 is excellent. Girls continue to develop skills of thinking for themselves in Years 10 and 11 and it is a feature of all classes that girls are at all times absorbed in their work. A Year 10 class, working in small groups, exchanged ideas and put forward very good practical suggestions about ways of measuring the energy released by burning different foods. They further appreciated the need for standardisation when comparing values. Overall achievement in Years 10 and 11 is excellent. The emphasis on group work in all years, with group members changing regularly, is a strength of the department. It develops social skills, the girls showing respect for each other and co-operating well. Relationships between teachers and girls are always constructive and lead to a pleasant and productive working atmosphere. Staff are well aware of the small number of girls who need additional support and there are no differences in the achievements of any groups of pupils in classes.
106. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers' very high subject expertise and skills in presenting information lead to highly effective learning. Lessons are planned very well although sometimes the checking of learning objectives to help girls assess their progress is incomplete. Teachers have high expectations and are constantly encouraging girls in their work. There is a pleasing variety of teaching approaches which maintains girls' interest and helps them to develop their enjoyment of science. Teachers are making very good use of laptop projector images to clarify and support their work. Marking of work is regular but inconsistent in giving specific advice on how to improve. Each year there is a comprehensive programme of visits organised for all years to further the enjoyment and interest of science and to provide support to studies. These include regular visits to the Greenwich Observatory, Kew Gardens and London Zoo as well as careers and field study trips.
107. Science is very well led and managed by a department head who is dedicated to delivering the highest possible standards for the pupils. He is well supported by subject heads and a strong staff team which includes four hardworking technicians. There is a shared commitment to subject improvement. Schemes of work are in place and regularly reviewed. Data are used well for self-review and evaluation but there is a need for increased electronic analysis of performance data to make the task less tedious and to show patterns more quickly. The use made of ICT is improving, all staff now making good use of laptops, and electronic whiteboards have been recently installed in two laboratories. Two chemistry laboratories have been recently refurbished to a high standard, but the remaining accommodation is old-fashioned and preparation and storage areas are only satisfactory. Literacy in science is very high and numeracy adequately supports all work.
108. Since the previous inspection improvement has been very good. In addition to improvements in accommodation, a tendency for teaching to be over-didactic has been fully addressed and action has been taken to make progress tracking more effective.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in information and communication technology (ICT) is **good**. The provision in discrete lessons is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils' standards in discrete ICT lessons are well above average.
- Teaching and learning are very good in discrete ICT lessons.
- Pupils' competence, productivity and attitudes to work are excellent.
- Computer facilities have considerably improved to be closer to the national average.
- Teachers in some subjects do not plan ICT regularly enough because access during lesson times is restricted.
- Pupils who take GCSE achieve very well.

Commentary

109. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school in ICT is above that seen in most schools. By the end of Year 9, attainment is well above average. All girls are accurately assessed by teachers as gaining Level 6 or above, and nearly three-quarters gaining the highest Level 7. Quality of work has increased as teachers have introduced assignments from the GCSE short course in Year 9. In 2004, all pupils entered for GCSE gained grades of C and above, and just over half gained an A* grade. This was an outstanding result, maintaining the high trend of previous years. The overall standard by the end of Year 11 is well above the national expectation. All girls are highly competent whether they take a GCSE examination or not. Their achievement is very good overall.
110. In lessons and work seen, girls' standards in discrete ICT lessons are well above average by the end of Year 9 and Year 11. Some Year 7 work seen in English was outstanding, for example a computer-generated Shakespearian motif printed onto a T-shirt as a marketing exercise. Year 8 girls develop very good numeracy skills using a spreadsheet to model mobile phone prices. Year 9 pupils' high achievement as autonomous users is evident when they reach the highest National Curriculum level through creating a website for a vet. They implement and test routines to a high standard, well above average expectations because of the quality of critical evaluation. This indicates a high level of literacy. In GCSE projects, Year 11 girls' presentation and layout are excellent, fully meeting end users' needs.
111. Teaching and learning are good overall, with some very good features. Teachers have excellent subject expertise and give individuals very good support when they are learning new routines and submitting GCSE coursework. Relationships are very good. Teachers plan lessons thoroughly, and use time to the full. This helps girls maintain excellent attitudes and a high level of productivity. They are eager to use computers in lessons and at lunchtimes. Year 11 girls are very competent users of a wide range of applications, including research from the Internet to explore and develop ideas. Those of higher ability, including those identified as gifted and talented, are not always given enough opportunities to create their own advanced projects, such as spreadsheet models, in lessons, though this happens frequently for homework.
112. The co-ordinator provides very good leadership and manages courses well in all years. The new Key Stage 3 Strategy is effective, but there is scope for additional tasks for younger and more gifted pupils, and more opportunities for girls to assess and record their own ICT progress in subjects. The subject was not inspected before but recent improvements have been very good, and there is very good capacity for further improvement. High standards are being maintained. Computer equipment has been considerably improved, so that it is now just about at the national average. However, it is still difficult for ICT skills to be developed in all subjects since the school has not received sufficient funding for computers and electronic whiteboards.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

113. Girls develop and use their highly competent skills well to support and extend work across curriculum subjects. They use home computers extensively to research on the Internet and present homework. They achieve very well when given the opportunity to use a variety of software applications to enhance their learning. Girls use ICT to develop and practise research and presentational skills particularly well in graphics, home economics, music and history. They are beginning to use multimedia well in several subjects, notably music, and outstanding examples of individual girls' use of multimedia packages were seen in English. Improved computing hardware and software ensure that computers are now more readily available in subject lessons to enhance pupils' achievement. Several new whiteboards, only recently installed, are not yet being used to their full potential because they were faulty on delivery and teachers have not been trained yet. Overall provision is good and National Curriculum requirements are met.

HUMANITIES

Geography

Provision in geography is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE are very high.
- The quality of teaching and learning is a strength of the department.
- Planning and administration are exemplary.
- Department leadership is excellent.
- The range of teaching and learning styles could be broadened by incorporating new technology.

Commentary

114. Standards at the end of Year 9 are consistently very high. All girls attain the expected Level 5 in the teacher assessments, with 98 per cent gaining Level 6 in 2004 – three times the national average. This pattern is repeated for GCSE where all girls regularly gain higher grades. In 2004, 82 per cent attained either an A or A* against a national average of 18 per cent. Achievement is excellent because of the girls' passion for learning, their ability to profit from targeted instruction and the meticulous preparation and experience of staff, especially in examination technique.

115. Work seen reflects the impact of the high quality teaching. Girls' capacity for independent learning and enquiry is high and homework is often way beyond any minimum sought. Standards of presentation are very high. The marking policy is consistently applied so that work has supportive comments to help progress. The policy on assessment and target setting and the recording of achievement is equally clear. The use of enquiry and associated skill development is well developed, and especially effective in GCSE fieldwork, which scores high marks because girls are encouraged to think. Standards of literacy and the application of numeracy and ICT are remarkably high.

116. The quality of teaching is very good overall, and often outstanding. It reflects the high expectations and standards of the subject specialists, experienced practitioners who coach their pupils in the art of examination techniques to score the highest grades. They plan lessons which develop great interest, understanding and geographical skill. Girls are put to the test regularly and know that high standards are demanded because the pace and challenge in lessons are great. The experience with examination criteria and requirements presses home important differences between description, explanation and evaluation and staff insist on very careful review of what questions mean and how girls can maximise mark-scoring – a factor which aids the consistently good academic record. Learning is a mirror image of teaching. Outstanding in its impact, it shows a keenness to succeed and is a sophisticated record of success. Especially effective is the development of independence in learning, because girls are confident, make their own notes and incorporate statistical and presentational techniques in addition to the written word. Attitudes and behaviour are exemplary as a result of the very good relationships and very high expectations. The contribution to moral, social and cultural development is unobtrusive but occurs regularly. It is sensitively handled, as seen in lessons on environmental issues, migration and immigration and population change.
117. The principal issue facing the department is to sustain all of this to maintain the high performance. A wider range of teaching and learning styles could come from the incorporation of the enhanced methodologies that the data projectors and whiteboards bring.
118. Leadership is excellent. The head of department has a clear vision and high expectation for the subject which is shared by her staff. Her management is very good, since administration is exemplary with updated work schemes, analysis of examination performance and a well constructed improvement plan which takes account of the findings of the rigorous analysis undertaken. Fieldwork has been extended to aid enquiry but, whilst this is particularly strong for GCSE, it is not a feature in all year groups. The issues identified at the previous inspection have been dealt with. Results have improved, and one hundred per cent success is consistent. The remarkable value being added to girls' achievement is a fitting tribute to the department.

History

Provision in history is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards at GCSE are very high.
- Very good teaching is leading to very good learning.
- History is a very popular option choice at GCSE.

Commentary

119. In 2004, GCSE results were well above the national average, with 97 per cent at grades A*-C and 77 per cent gaining A*/A grades. In 2003, results were even higher. This represents very good achievement for all pupils. Standards in the current Years 10 and 11 are equally high. Girls demonstrate very good knowledge and understanding, for example in their ability to decide upon the most important factors behind important medical developments such as vaccinations. This understanding

underpins their excellent discussion work in lessons. Their enquiry skills are equally strong. All girls are compiling excellent note sets that will be invaluable for revision purposes. They enjoy studying history and it is a very popular option choice.

120. Standards in the current Year 9 are well above national expectations. This represents very good achievement. Girls demonstrate increasing knowledge and understanding of events and people in the past. Year 9 girls, for example, showed a sophisticated understanding of what makes a 'good' general when discussing Sir Douglas Haig. Their written communication skills are very good and when given the opportunity to undertake independent enquiry their responses are frequently excellent.
121. The quality of teaching and learning is very good in all years. Relationships between pupils and teachers are excellent. Girls are interested by the wide variety of activities in lessons and work at a terrific pace. They respond with enthusiasm to the frequent opportunities for discussion and group work that teachers create. At GCSE, teaching prepares the girls very well for the demands of the examination whilst at the same time providing a lively and challenging course. In a very good Year 10 lesson, girls were given a choice in their groups on how to present their comparisons of the merits of different anaesthetics. Then, through questioning, the teacher skilfully channelled their creativity so that they reached a secure understanding that they are unlikely to forget. Teacher assessment is very thorough and gives girls good guidance on what they need to do to improve, particularly at GCSE.
122. Leadership of history is excellent and management is very good. Where problems have been identified, effective action has been taken. The teachers of history make a very strong team and are committed to their work. A number of improvements have been made since the last inspection such as the increased use of ICT. Teachers work very hard to minimise the negative impact of girls having to work with some very dated resources, especially in Years 7 to 9. A significant strength is the fact that every girl in each year is able to undertake a visit to an historic site or museum. This, together with visitors to school, such as a Roman legionary, serves to deepen their sense of the past.

TECHNOLOGY

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is excellent.
- Leadership and management are excellent.
- The quality of work produced at GCSE is outstanding.
- Girls' interest, attitudes and enthusiasm for the subject are excellent.
- Assessment and the development of pupil self-evaluation are exemplary.
- Girls learn to work very well both in groups and independently.
- The provision for multi-media ICT is underdeveloped.

Commentary

123. For pupils aged 14 in 2004, attainment was well above the national average. Levels of attainment in designing and making skills are average on entry, but many girls reach standards well above the national average as a result of excellent teaching. At GCSE, standards in resistant materials, graphic products and food technology are well above national averages, with many girls achieving outstanding results, well above the national average; in 2004, 100 per cent of girls attained A* to C grades. Seventy-three per cent of girls achieved A* and A grades.
124. These high standards were also seen during the inspection where most girls made excellent gains in skills, knowledge and understanding of the design and make process; folder work demonstrates rapid progress, for example in written evaluations. Girls achieve very well in relation to prior attainment, particularly in food technology, and in both graphics and resistant materials the quality and finish of the work produced are exceptional. Practical skills are developed systematically and girls enthusiastically take part in lessons. Workshop facilities are very good and appropriate for a modern curriculum; this, linked to excellent technician support, has a significant effect on the standard and quality of work produced.
125. Teaching is excellent; it is a real strength of the department. Girls concentrate very well on their work and the pace of lessons is always excellent. Schemes of work are very well prepared and lesson planning is consistent across all areas. Aims, objectives and learning outcomes are communicated to the groups and most girls know and understand exactly what is expected of them. Lesson plans are always clear. Although most girls are of high ability, very well planned individualised teaching ensures that they are appropriately challenged by staff who have very high expectations. Between the ages of 11 and 14, girls develop practical skills very well and often work to a very high level of design awareness. They use an excellent range of very well taught presentation techniques, for example in the translation of isometric to orthographic projection. Consistent class management ensures that no time is wasted on maintaining order and, consequently, girls use tools and equipment with confidence and skill. An appropriate balance is achieved between making and designing, homework being used very well to support the practical sessions. Excellent teaching of practical modelling at GCSE ensures that graphical skills and software navigation are learned systematically, for example in the production of pop-up books and packaging where pupils aged 15 and 16 produced work of a marketable quality. A significant majority of girls produce work that is outstanding.
126. Relationships between teachers and pupils are excellent and praise and encouragement are used to great effect. This is particularly evident in the clean-down in food and in looking after tools and equipment in resistant materials. The social, moral and cultural aspects of diets and nutritional requirements are explored, using visiting speakers, and girls learn to enjoy food from a wide range of cultures.
127. Leadership and management are excellent. The head of department provides a role model for both staff and girls. The strategic vision and joint planning, led by the head of department, has a direct result on the quality and standards that are achieved. There have been some staffing difficulties but these have been dealt with so well that the integration and induction of new staff have been seamless. Assessment procedures are excellent, as are the monitoring and tracking of pupils. Marking is individualised to ensure that the girls know what they have to do to refine and improve their work. Internal standardisation of levels and grades takes place, ensuring that pupils are informed about their progress. Accommodation is very good, as are resources, but a lack of interactive whiteboards does limit the power of demonstration

to whole classes when introducing new software or visual resources. Facilities also need to be improved for computed-aided design and manufacture.

128. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Results at GCSE in resistant materials, graphic products and food technology have improved, with a higher percentage of girls achieving the higher grades. Progress has been made in use of ICT and new courses have been developed. Very good use is made of ICT to record pupils' work, both in progress and on completion. The methodical development of literacy and language skills in planning ensures that staff can talk to girls at a very sophisticated level using subject-specific language.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Very good specialist teaching ensures girls achieve very well in Years 7 to 9.
- Excellent teaching strategies in Years 10 and 11 result in girls achieving very high grades in GCSE examinations.
- Very good assessment practices ensure all girls know how to improve.
- Very well planned extra-curricular programmes enhance learning opportunities.
- Excellent leadership and very good management skills create a welcoming and industrious ethos.
- There are insufficient facilities for ICT in the department.

Commentary

129. In 2004, teacher assessment results at the end of Year 9 were above the national average; present standards are well above. In the same year the proportion gaining the higher grades A*-C in the GCSE examination was significantly higher (at 100 per cent) than the national average and has been maintained since 2003. Early indications show that girls are well placed to meet similar coursework requirements for 2005. Given that many girls enter Year 7 with a wide disparity of prior experience in using materials such as clay, fabrics and printmaking and some having under-developed drawing skills, their achievement by the end of Year 9 is excellent.
130. Girls make very effective use of a wide range of two-dimensional image-making techniques and materials, including graphite pencils, paints and printmaking, as well as three-dimensional construction and modelling materials. In Year 8, girls work co-operatively on 'joiner' paintings, each reworking a section of a large painting such as the 'Adoration of the Magi' by Botticelli and assembling it on completion to form a large wall painting. This was in response to a year group visit to the National Gallery to compare a selection of paintings about The Nativity, and represents one of many ways in which the religious aspect of girls' learning permeates the curriculum. Girls are clearly articulate when discussing their own work and use very good levels of specialist technical vocabulary when comparing their own drawings and paintings with those of recognised artists. They are well able to recognise important art movements, both European and from other cultures, ancient and modern. They use sketchbooks and homework exercises very well to research or extend work in lessons. Girls in

Year 7, for example, used the Internet, books and periodicals to find examples of the later 'cut-out' works by the French artist Matisse for homework. They carefully made their own pastiche to develop understanding of the visual qualities created by cut and torn paper outlines, using it as a basis for subsequent collage work. In class, they developed this as a medium for expression, when learning about negative and positive shapes in figure drawing.

131. Achievement and standards in Years 10 and 11 are excellent. Girls organise ideas well, and they are creative, resourceful and diligent. They quickly adapt to coursework requirements and take increasing responsibility for their own ideas and their implementation. They are restricted because of a lack of sufficient ICT facilities in the department. This constraint is acute in a visual subject and compounded by the shortage of good quality art books in the library. Girls use digital photography well as a starting point for portraits and landscapes. They also use home computers well to research artists and other cultures. Following a group visit to Tate Britain, girls worked on a theme of 'Heroes' exploring their own aspirations and comparing these with features in the lives of contemporary celebrities and 'ordinary' people. They demonstrated clear insights into what makes some human beings inspirational, whilst developing sophisticated practical skills in portraiture. This illustrates the strong contribution which much of the work in the department makes to the excellent spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of students. Girls use mathematical skills to scale up small sketches and drawings. Their larger paintings and sculptures are of outstanding quality.
132. The quality of teaching is very good in Years 7 to 9 and excellent in Years 10 and 11. Teachers collaborate well when planning and assessing students' work. They demonstrate excellent subject knowledge and practical capability, which girls recognise, appreciate and emulate. Teachers know their pupils well and have very high expectations for them. They plan dynamic, stimulating and challenging learning experiences. They strike a very good balance between providing whole-class, group and individual help. Lessons are well paced to provide optimum challenge and focus concentration. Teachers regularly track girls' progress and give clear written and verbal comments to explain grades, ensuring that girls know what to do to improve. The teaching of three-dimensional disciplines, such as ceramics, sculpture and textiles, is very well developed. Girls are highly motivated because of the interesting learning activities planned by teachers and also because of their own well-developed desire to excel. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds or for whom English is an additional language participate fully in all activities and make similar progress to their peers. This is because of the welcoming and inclusive ethos in the department.
133. Leadership is excellent and accounts for the good improvements made since the previous inspection. Management skills are very good. Relationships are excellent. Girls' work on display is often inspirational and of excellent standard but it is insufficiently well labelled or interpreted for the onlooker (pupil or adult) to gain the depth of understanding which it merits, and opportunities are lost for others to learn from it fully. Facilities for ICT are insufficient.

Drama

Provision for drama is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Stimulating teaching motivates girls to be creative.
- Clear learning objectives are set for improvisation.
- Girls achieve well above average results in public examinations.
- A rich programme of extra-curricular activities widens opportunities.

Commentary

134. In 2004, GCSE drama results were well above the national average, and the number achieving the highest grades was well above average. In Year 10 and 11 lessons observed during the inspection, girls confidently used a wide range of drama skills and techniques, and the standard of performance was very good. The quality of written course work at the end of Year 11 is very high, demonstrating a secure understanding of different dramatic styles and genres. In Years 7 to 9 the standard of work seen in lessons is above average. The quality of written work which girls produce in response to their practical work is well above average. Overall, achievement in drama from Years 7 to 11 is very good.
135. Teaching and learning are very good. Lessons are very well planned with a variety of stimulating resources. This was evident in the Year 11 workshop '*Punishment and Guilt*' which led directly to the completion of coursework of a very high standard. Very good pace is established in lessons, ensuring that they are very productive. Very clear learning objectives are set in lessons and revised to check girls' understanding of the task. Performance work is regularly reviewed in lessons, and the department is developing very good strategies for involving girls in assessment of their own and others' performance. Teachers monitor the acquisition of drama skills, and use very good questioning and intervention techniques to help girls develop their ideas.
136. Girls have excellent attitudes to their work and thoroughly enjoy drama lessons. They respond very confidently, and all work hard in group and paired work, including those who might be less confident about their improvisation skills. They work very well together and on their own, and move easily and happily into the grouping arrangements which the teacher plans. Drama lessons make a very strong contribution to the development of girls' teamwork, social skills and individual confidence. Year 11 girls receive great enjoyment from their course and benefit from taking the subject. They are all effectively and productively engaged in lessons, including those who are gifted and talented.
137. The newly qualified subject teacher leads the drama department very well and has very good support from an associate head of department. Very good management of the department includes very effective use of examination data to guide planning for the subject. The subject leader has worked hard to establish comprehensive schemes of work and lesson plans, which are having a positive impact on raising standards further, and also make a very strong contribution to the school's citizenship programme. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good as results have remained well above average and the quality of teaching has improved.

138. A very good extra-curricular programme exists which provides a range of opportunities from performance to theatre visits. Large numbers of girls have the opportunity to take part in a staged show. Recent changes to the drama studio and its planned refurbishment should enhance what is quite a limiting space, particularly when the group size is large.

Music

Provision in music is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- GCSE results are very high, representing excellent achievement.
- Girls in Years 7 to 9 make rapid progress because of excellent teaching and an innovative curriculum.
- Rich opportunities for extra-curricular music and music for the liturgy support the learning of girls of all capabilities in music.
- Resources in ICT are very good, but access is limited in Year 9.
- Resources and space are used well, but accommodation is limited.

Commentary

139. GCSE results in 2004 were as high as in previous years. Nine in ten entrants gained passes at grades A* or A grades and all achieved A* to C, representing excellent achievement. Girls enter Year 7 with average standards in music. Teachers' assessments of girls' work at the end of Year 9 in 2004 indicated very high standards. Currently, standards in Year 9 are well above expectation, which shows excellent achievement. In Years 7 and 8, achievement is higher than expected. Excellent progress is made in lessons because all girls follow a curriculum taught in smaller groups and, in Year 7, a vocal activity timetabled for a whole year group. Mid-way through Year 8 most girls reach the national expectation for the end of Year 9.
140. In Year 7, girls exuberantly participate in activities that encourage them to use thinking skills, rhythm games to support literacy, mature vocabulary and musical performances to enhance learning. Stimulating examples using ICT from musical sound sources, including a vocoder, multi-timbral digital resources, electronic keyboards and acoustic instruments, provide support for composing and performing skills. In Year 8, the use of an interactive whiteboard helps girls to internalise patterns and riffs in 12-bar blues, understand musical techniques such as layering, and improves their ability to compose music for a film soundtrack.
141. In Years 10 and 11, standards are currently high. Achievement is excellent because girls extend their learning through participation in out-of-class musical activities – high quality instrumental lessons, choirs, orchestras, a Gospel Choir and school productions – which complement their GCSE course. In the dress rehearsal for *Bugsy Malone*, girls from Year 9 through to the sixth form showed very good stage presence with controlled and stylistically accurate vocal ability.

142. Teaching and learning, including that involving visiting instrumental teachers, are excellent in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Pitched and un-pitched percussion, electronic instruments and keyboards build on girls' previous learning. They enthusiastically improvise melodies over chords in a given structure. In Year 8 the combination of musical skills with action, dance and movement helps ideas come to life. In Year 10 and 11 revision activities are supported by innovative small composing tasks, with rondo or aspects of Gamelan playing. In Years 10 and 11, teachers make effective use of ICT to enable girls to produce mature compositions in African Dance, Ground Bass or Variation ideas. Participation in instrumental and vocal lessons is double the government target and three times the national average. Several orchestras, choirs and ensemble groups are effective because of the match of teaching to the learning needs of the girls.
143. Excellent leadership and very good management make a positive contribution to standards. Accommodation is restricted which affects learning in Year 9 and in some extra-curricular sessions. Links with the community extend pupils' musical experiences through participation in the local education authority A-level music course, carol services, club and workshop trips.
144. Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good, particularly in the use of ICT and the Year 7 to 9 curriculum. Girls leave school with a highly developed sense of imagination and creativity in music.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Provision in physical education is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Pupils have excellent attitudes to their work.
- Pupils are very well taught and learn very well.
- Standards of work are well above those found nationally.
- Extra-curricular activities add a strong support to physical education and dance.
- Although improved since the last inspection, accommodation is poor overall.
- Sufficient time is still not allowed for physical education, particularly for Years 10 and 11.

Commentary

145. Standards are well above national levels throughout. In the school's first assessments of girls aged eleven, about two thirds achieved results that would be expected nationally, the other third showing results above that level. In the July 2004 National Curriculum tests for pupils aged 14, more than nine tenths of girls achieved results above the average for that age. These findings mirror those of other recent years. Girls therefore make significant progress between the ages of 11 and 14. There were no entries for GCSE in 2004, but a group of the present Year 10 has begun the two-year GCSE dance course.
146. In Years 7 to 9, girls of the whole range of capabilities reach well above national standards. In half the lessons observed, standards of work were significantly above even that high level. In a Year 9 dance lesson, all girls reached the highest standards of planning choreography, in performing short sequences and refining those

sequences to improve. Within a lesson on relay practice in Year 8, standards of acceleration and control grew noticeably. This was supported by the girls' own planning and their co-operative leadership within groups.

147. In all Year 10 and 11 lessons, standards were well above average. In Health-Related Fitness, girls built very well upon previous learning. All were very capable of developing and refining circuits for specific activities. Teaching was always aimed at all groups and individuals, so that in each lesson everyone was given help to reach her own highest standards. Those who occasionally had difficulties were also significantly assisted in this way. Standards of written work for GCSE dance are above average.
148. Pupils' achievement is always very good. In Years 7 to 9, achievement was excellent in half the lessons seen. Year 9 pupils develop complex dance movements. They show understanding of how to plan sequences, which both fit the music as well as creating patterns of movement. Thinking and discussion are of a very high order, leading to fluid and very effective movement patterns. Gifted Year 11 pupils in health and fitness understand the backgrounds to oxygen depletion, making significant deductions which help them to re-plan circuits.
149. The quality of teaching and learning is very good throughout; it was excellent in one third of the lessons observed. Teachers plan excellently for their pupils' learning. Their subject background and their expectation of self and pupils are very strong. Teachers are effectively concerned for all girls, both from the point of view of both ability and background. Calmness, clear explanations and listening feature very strongly. Teachers set challenging tasks, as in all warm-ups seen, so that girls develop ideas at speed in preparation for later learning. In their turn, girls form partnerships to enhance the quality of learning of all. Those who are more skilled, as well as extending their own standards, have a care for their peers. The excellent attitudes of all pupils to physical education and dance provide support to their standards and achievement. Behaviour is always excellent.
150. Physical education is well led and managed by the very capable head of department and co-operatively by both teachers. Resources strongly contribute to successful learning. The growing use of video recording helps observe and improve performance. Very thorough assessment within each lesson and over time helps girls to know their standards and to improve. More work has begun to enable them to be clearer about the exact level they are reaching in each activity.
151. Since the last inspection, progress has been satisfactory. High standards of work and achievement have been maintained. Standards of teaching, already high, have risen. Girls continue to represent their school and local area in a wide variety of sports and other physical activities. The curriculum now contains all elements required but there is still insufficient time allocated, especially in Years 10 and 11 where time allowed is well below expectation. Although steps have been taken to improve the quality of accommodation, with the resurfacing of the excellently maintained outdoor courts and the use of the chapel as an indoor space, there are still problems. The hall is often needed for other things and so is unavailable for lessons or extra-curricular activities. The grassed area is too small, and so is the chapel, where some activities take place. The overall quality and amount of accommodation are poor as a support for teaching and learning.

152. There is a wide range of extra-curricular activities, including athletics, football, hockey and rounders, involving a significant number of pupils. These strongly support school teams and provide extra help to the gifted. The school is working hard to extend what it offers to involve more girls wishing to be involved in pleasurable sports-based leisure activities.

PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND HEALTH EDUCATION AND CITIZENSHIP

Citizenship

Provision in citizenship is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Leadership is excellent and all form tutors have had subject training.
- The very good, identifiable programme with discrete policies and schemes of work enables all tutors to plan challenging and interesting lessons.
- Girls recognise citizenship strands within other subjects.
- A very good programme of outside speakers supports learning.
- Committed teachers know their pupils well. Relationships are excellent.
- Girls recognise the work of the school council as a democratic system within the school and use it as a forum for debate and action.

Commentary

153. The school makes this provision within the pastoral curriculum, of which education for living, careers education, work-related learning and religious education are all strands. Citizenship is also taught through assemblies and tutorial programmes. It is also planned within each subject area, where it is identified to girls as such. Standards are well above those expected for this age range; achievement by Year 11 is excellent.
154. By the end of Year 9, girls have very good understanding of globalisation. They track their own family groceries from countries of origin, manner of transport and the trends and impact of immigration on populations. They use flow charts, diagrams and maps to support written exercises when developing very good understanding of business systems. They know what constitutes a limited company and understand concepts of profits and loss. They are keen to understand the dynamics of the business and industrial world and how decisions are made. They recognise that their school is also a workplace with agreed systems and levels of responsibility. They are especially articulate when researching gender issues and hold clear opinions when discussing questions such as 'Do women get a fair deal?' They develop very good skills in communication through class discussions, group work and wider debate.
155. By the end of Year 11, girls have compiled a record of personal involvement in activities in their citizenship logs. Casual admissions to the school are paired with 'buddies' to help them settle in, and sixth form 'Guardian Angels' act as peer mentors to Year 7 pupils. Girls are very well prepared for work experience by their teachers and with the Connexions staff. All demonstrate high levels of personal responsibility by approaching workplace employers themselves to organise appointments and interviews. They prepare curriculum vitae and complete excellent bound personal profiles. These contain all their accumulated written work and track their personal development from their first tentative week in school.

156. Many themes, which girls learn about in earlier years, are looked at a second time in more detail or closer focus as girls mature and understanding deepens. In addition to understanding the workings of the body and how to stay healthy, girls develop very good understanding of mental health issues. They learn how to recognise and minimise stress, deal with deadlines and understand the importance of relaxation techniques. They prepare very carefully for debates and 'Friday Talks', where they develop confidence as well as competence in public speaking skills. Homework is very well used to increase understanding and develop research skills. Girls argue for and against institutions such as the monarchy, are knowledgeable about parliamentary systems and have very good understanding and informed personal opinions about the EU. Students' own inclusive attitudes and excellent behaviour in all areas of school life bear clear testimony to the efficacy of the whole pastoral curriculum of which citizenship is a part. This also shows excellent achievement. Students take part in a wide range of charitable activities to show support and concern for those less fortunate. Students participate in the affairs of the School Council. Senior staff always attend these sessions in order for action to take place after student recommendations are accepted. Students report that subsequent action serves to demonstrate the effectiveness of democracy in decision taking.
157. The quality of teaching is excellent. Teachers are confident, very well prepared and committed. All form tutors have undergone subject training. They know their pupils very well and care for their personal as well as academic welfare. Schemes of work are very detailed and there are very good resources to support learning. Homework is well used to research topics or to extend lesson themes. Written work is regularly checked and girls know how to improve. Citizenship opportunities and themes are clearly identified in subjects. Girls know when this occurs.
158. Leadership and management are excellent. Much work has gone into auditing and rewriting the pastoral curriculum to ensure discrete elements are not just covered but taught well. The subject is regularly reviewed. Three senior and specialist teachers actively collaborate to teach elements such as economic awareness, health education and religious and political issues, across all year groups, and this is a strong feature within the subject. There is a very good programme of outside speakers and agencies to support learning. On entry to Year 7 and Year 10 there is an induction session for parents and girls which helps to encourage full participation in the programme.

SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, 13 subjects were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

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

Level 3 GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Art	3	100	82.8	33.3	25.4	30	31.1
Biology	5	80	65.7	40	10.8	34	20.6
Chemistry	6	100	72.8	33.3	14.4	38.3	24.1
Classical studies	5	100	90.9	60	40	42	38.3
Communication studies	3	100	88.3	66.7	27	50	33.8
Economics	3	100	76.4	0	22.6	30	28.4
English literature	19	100	87.8	10.5	18	35.8	30.5
French	13	100	80.2	15.4	19.4	33.9	28.2
General studies	40	100	75.5	7.5	18.8	38.8	26.7
Geography	7	100	79.3	42.8	24.7	45.7	29.7
German	3	100	82.1	0	19.2	16.7	29.2
History	4	100	83.7	75	23.7	52.5	30.6
Information technology	3	100	70.2	33.3	10.2	40	22.1
Mathematics	16	81.3	66.2	18.8	17.3	30	23.5
Other languages (Italian)	2	100	82.5	50	46.5	30	37.8
Other social studies	16	93.8	70.2	50	17.7	43.8	24.7
Physics	2	100	78.8	50	25.9	50	29.6
Sociology	2	100	73.1	0	21.1	35	26.7

Spanish	2	100	76.4	0	14.7	30	25.8
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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	8	100	98.8	62.5	53.6	95	89.5
Biology	25	100	97	44	42.6	75.2	81.3
Business studies	15	100	99.1	46.7	42.1	89.3	83.2
Chemistry	19	100	98.2	36.8	52.4	86.3	87.5
Classical studies	20	100	99.7	70	62	99	94.5
Communication studies	16	100	99.4	62.5	44.1	97.5	85.4
Drama	11	100	99.7	72.7	45.6	100	86.8
Economics	14	100	99.1	71.4	58.6	97.1	92.5
English literature	36	100	99.4	75	44.7	97.2	85.5
French	7	100	99.1	57.1	53	100	89
Design and technology	4	100	98.9	100	43.1	110	83.6
General studies	72	100	95.7	43	31.6	86.7	74.2
Geography	18	100	99.1	100	52.9	114.4	89.1
German	2	100	98.7	50	49.3	90	86.5
History	36	100	99	88.9	48.8	111.1	86.9
Home economics	4	100	98	50	45	100	81.9
Information technology	7	100	97.8	57.1	27.9	88.6	73.8
Latin	6	100	-	83.3	-	106	-
Mathematics	24	100	97.3	83.3	58.4	102.5	90.9
Music	4	100	98.8	100	40.6	115	81.8
Other languages (Italian)	5	100	97.6	100	66.8	100	96.1

Other social studies	22	100	97.8	86.3	45.7	107.3	83.7
Performing arts	5	100	-	40	-	76	-
Physics	5	100	98	60	50.6	96	86.6
Politics	6	100	-	100	-	103.3	-
Religious education	8	100	99.3	87.5	51.1	105	88.3
Sociology	10	100	98.6	90	47.4	112	85.9
Spanish	5	100	98.4	60	53.2	100	88.6
Sports/PE studies	4	100	98.1	25	41.2	75	81.6

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

English

Provision in English literature is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The leadership of the department is excellent.
- Standards are consistently well above the national average.
- Very good teaching ensures that learning is challenging and enjoyable.
- Assessment is excellent.
- Students achieve very well because of their strong commitment and hard work.
- Improvement since the previous inspection has been very good.

Commentary

159. Results at A-level in 2004 were well above national expectations, as they were in 2003. More than two out of every three students regularly gain grades A or B. Standards of work seen during the inspection are well above those attained by all students nationally. The most able write with controlled assurance. Their writing on *Othello*, Keats and the poets of the Great War, for example, is particularly perceptive and sensitive, showing very good critical and analytical skills as well as a close and thorough understanding of the texts. Students are also very aware of the moral, social and cultural inspiration upon the writers they study and how these influence their works. Essays are thoroughly planned and researched; students' writing and argument are mature and their interpretations well justified. Personal responses to all three literary genres show that students are confident enough to have independent and sometimes controversial views and to justify them well.
160. Students' achievement is very good. Because of very good teaching and their own positive and eager attitudes, students' writing, research and oral skills mature rapidly in the sixth form. Activities, such as a good range of theatre visits, lectures and university links and a visit to the battlefields of the Great War, considerably enhance students' learning opportunities. Excellent relationships, both between themselves and with their teachers, also contribute well to students' achievement. They work very well, independently and collaboratively, and enjoy their lessons, particularly when researching topics which they have chosen themselves, using their computer skills, engaging in dramatic approaches to texts or giving presentations.
161. Teaching and learning are very good overall, and sometimes excellent. Assessment is of high quality and is used very effectively to show students what they need to do to improve and to set them targets. All teachers have very good subject knowledge, very high expectations of their students and plan well to make lessons relevant, challenging and enjoyable, as well as to ensure academic and intellectual rigour. Students are inspired by their teachers and clearly share their enthusiasm for literature.
162. The leadership of this dedicated team of teachers is excellent. The head of department encourages and supports staff well, particularly in their professional development, and sets a fine example of commitment and dedication. Management is very good. The department is a thinking department which regularly evaluates its own performance and shares best practice. It is constantly looking for ways to improve

even further: it is about to increase curriculum choices by introducing a combined English and literature option in September, for example. Improvement since the previous inspection is very good. Teaching is now consistently very good; consequently, students achieve very well and standards have risen even higher.

Language and literacy across the curriculum

163. Standards of English and literacy in the sixth form are very high, enabling students to make very good progress in their chosen courses. Speaking and listening are very impressive because there are many opportunities in all lessons for students to explain, explore and evaluate, to debate, justify and challenge a wide range of concepts, theories and opinions. Teaching is very good, with research, note-taking and careful planning for essay writing explicitly taught in all subjects and assessment and learning objectives regularly discussed with students.

Media studies

Two lessons in media studies were sampled. The quality of teaching seen in Year 13 was very good; it was excellent in Year 12. Standards in examinations and in the work seen are well above the national average. Achievement is very good. Students respond eagerly and critically to a stimulating range of visual, written and spoken texts. In their lessons and work, they readily use the subject's specialist language and demonstrate a very good understanding of the concepts and ethics associated with the academic study of the media. They also show excellent research skills in their personal topic work.

French

Provision in French is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching and learning are very good and students achieve very well.
- Detailed marking helps students to improve their work.
- All students take part in a work experience exchange visit to a French-speaking country.
- Course documentation does not adequately reflect current practice.

Commentary

164. Results at A-level in 2004 were well above national average and half of the students entered were awarded grade A. This was an improvement on the results from 2003. At AS-level almost all students gained at least a grade C and nearly a quarter of them grade A. This represents well above average attainment.

165. Standards observed in both the AS and A-level courses are well above average. In Year 12, students develop skills in discussing questions such as personal priorities in choosing a career. They readily and accurately express their own ideas in French and have good accents. They write at length using an appropriate range of vocabulary and structure. Students in Year 13 understand French television news bulletins and write their own scripts.

166. The achievement of all sixth form students in lessons is very good. They begin AS-level with the higher grades in GCSE and rapidly progress so that they can use French to express carefully formulated opinion in speech and writing. Some students receive extra support during the first ten weeks of the course by attending booster classes, which have a good impact on their performance. They work with texts of increasing length and complexity, and recall vocabulary to use in new contexts. They

work conscientiously and with obvious interest and enjoyment. In Year 13, students work more independently using the wide range of resources provided by their teacher. They write at length on topics such as immigration and use knowledge from other subject areas in their work.

167. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers use French effectively to develop listening and speaking. New topics are introduced by careful questioning, and students make rapid progress because of the prudent planning of activities and resources. Year 13 students make their own notes during the lesson and work independently on topics with materials provided by their teacher or from their own research.
168. The quality of leadership and management is very good. Students benefit from teachers' planning to meet individual needs. Courses successfully promote in-depth knowledge and secure skills, but the schemes of work are not up to date with current practice. Procedures for assessment are very well planned and students understand the requirements of the examinations.
169. Students benefit from their participation in the European work experience exchange. They gain motivation and determination to succeed. Information and communication technology is used regularly in lessons and its possibilities are being further explored. Students also have the opportunity to practise speaking French in additional lessons with the French language assistant.
170. Since the previous inspection progress has been very good. Students know how to improve their work because of the detailed marking and frequent assessment. Through their use of ICT and their visits abroad they have a mature awareness of the value of their studies in their future lives.

MATHEMATICS

The focus was on advanced level mathematics. Further Mathematics AS-level was sampled. In the lesson seen, excellent teaching based on a thorough knowledge of the course and students' needs enabled all to make outstanding progress and achieve very well.

Provision in mathematics is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards are very high: students achieve outstandingly well because of excellent teaching.
- All teachers successfully promote the excellent attitudes to the subject.
- Leadership and management are excellent.

Commentary

171. The A level results in 2004 were well above average: every student passed, and over four-fifths gained grades A or B. Large numbers of students choose to do A-level mathematics and few drop out before completing the course. Large numbers also enrol on to the AS-level further mathematics course in Year 13. Standards observed in both lessons and in students' completed work confirm very high standards.

172. Students start their advanced studies with standards that are usually already above national averages. Because of excellent teaching, they make outstanding progress and their achievement is second to none. Students feel extremely well supported and enjoy the lessons immensely. Their work is marked thoroughly and they know exactly how well they are doing. Such meticulous marking allows teachers to know precisely what each student needs to do next and to ensure that lessons are pitched to meet the needs of each student very closely. As a result, students are strongly challenged and produce work of consistently high quality. All teachers in the department share in the teaching of advanced level work, and all share the same enthusiasm for the subject, which is communicated to students most effectively. This is also evident in the availability and take-up of enhancement activities that include outside speakers and competitions.
173. Teaching and learning are of consistently very high quality because the leadership that drives the department's vision is itself outstanding. The department is led by example with passion, which ensures that all staff members work harmoniously to promote the enjoyment of the subject. Excellent management ensures that the consistency of students' experiences is maintained.
174. At the time of the last inspection, teaching, progress and leadership were good: these have improved to an excellent level and this corresponds to excellent progress since the last inspection.

Mathematics across the curriculum

175. The provision for mathematics across the curriculum is excellent. Students often study complementary subjects at AS and A-level, and they easily transfer their skills to new situations, for example in the sciences and geography.

SCIENCE

Chemistry was inspected in full; biology and physics were sampled. Standards are well above average for A-level biology in 2004; in physics there were too few entries to make a valid comparison, though all students achieved their target grade or exceeded it.

Two biology lessons were seen – one in Year 12 and one in Year 13. Teaching overall was very good. Teachers showed excellent subject expertise and emphasised skills of interpretation, for example of graphs and diagrams. Very good everyday analogies were used for presentations. In an excellent lesson, the comparison of the structure of a chlorophyll molecule to a solar panel enabled students to understand fully its role in sunlight absorption during photosynthesis.

In physics, a good lesson was seen in Year 13, well presented by the teacher using ICT to enable all students to understand the similarities and differences between gravitational, electric and magnetic fields. Students showed very good background knowledge, and standards were well above average. Discussions with Year 12 students about their work showed high standards; the majority achieve or exceed their predicted grades. This is greatly assisted by their outstanding mathematical capability.

Chemistry

Provision in chemistry is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The high expertise of the teachers gives the students confidence in their learning.
- Students respond positively to a variety of teaching approaches with a very good attitude to learning.
- Overall attainment is above national standards, but the proportion of students achieving higher grades was only average in 2004.
- Leadership and management are very good.

Commentary

176. Standards in the AS-level examinations in 2003 and 2004 were above the national average. Chemistry is a popular subject in Year 12, with numbers increasing yearly; current students are working at a similar above average level. Standards at A-level in 2003 were well above national average when compared to all schools and above in comparison with similar schools. In 2004 standards were above average compared to all schools and in line in comparison with similar schools. The achievement of students based on prior attainment is good. The present Year 13 is producing work of above average standard and booster classes are now provided to address the higher grades issue. Evidence of very good scientific reasoning was seen in a Year 12 group using thermochemical data to explain differences between theoretical and experimental results. A Year 13 group demonstrated very good thinking skills in interpreting and explaining colour changes observed in a series of ligand exchange experiments.
177. The quality of teaching is very good, giving students confidence and enabling them to learn very effectively. Lessons are very well planned and a variety of teaching approaches stimulates students' interest. Homework is used very well to reinforce learning and students are provided with very good supporting notes which they use well for revision purposes. Marking is very good with helpful comments on how students can improve their standards. Relationships are very good and teachers are always ready to help and advise in their own time. Students support and help each other effectively as part of their learning. In some classes students show hesitance in answering questions and a reluctance to enter into discussions. Teachers are not always challenging in their approach and in their expectation that students will think enough for themselves.
178. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department provides knowledgeable leadership of the curriculum and there are good systems for self-evaluation and planning for improvement. Target setting, based on careful analysis of prior attainment and of students' test results, is well established. Recently refurbished laboratories, supported by good resources, provide a supportive environment for learning. Resources in ICT are good and the application and use in the delivery of the curriculum are developing. Improvements since the last inspection have been very good, particularly with regard to accommodation and the increased variety of teaching approaches.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Provision in ICT was sampled in two lessons. Examination results at AS and A2 level are consistently well above the national average, and students achieve very well. Students

make good progress in preparing coursework, and Year 13 students are predicted to attain above average results. Good teaching ensured that they were made fully aware of examination assessment criteria using a very effective checklist, and the need to test routines created. Computer equipment is up to date, and technician support is excellent.

Information and communication technology across the curriculum

179. Students have highly competent ICT skills that are more than sufficient to meet curricular needs across subjects. Some subjects make imaginative and constructive use of ICT to improve students' achievement, such as physics, music, Latin, graphics, media studies, art and mathematics; teachers are making increasingly good use of multimedia software to enrich classroom learning. Information and communication technology is not used sufficiently in science or humanities subjects, but the recent installation of interactive electronic whiteboards and opportunities for further staff training should help these subjects make more use of ICT to enhance students' achievement in class.

HUMANITIES

Classical civilisation

Provision in classical civilisation is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results in 2004 in AS and A-level classical civilisation examinations were well above the national average.
- Students make very good progress because of the high expectations and challenging questions of their teachers.
- Advice is detailed and gives clear guidance on how to improve.
- The commitment and expertise of the subject leader and her team are inspirational.
- Information and communication technology is not integrated fully into schemes of work.

Commentary

180. Standards at the end of Year 12 and 13 in classical civilisation are well above the national average. In 2004, 72 per cent of girls gained A and B grades at A-level, with 61 per cent gaining A and B grades at AS. There was a 100 per cent pass rate at both levels and these results show an improvement on those of 2003.

181. Standards seen in lessons reflect the examination results and girls of all capabilities achieve very well. They are mature in their approach to work and essays are well organised, well argued and well supported with evidence. They have a detailed understanding and a very good grasp of the main themes in their studies of classical literature. In a Year 13 discussion on the theme of justice in Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*, for example, students supported their astute views with evidence from the text, some quoting lines from memory and drawing upon evidence from other ancient plays. Girls have excellent attitudes to their learning and take a real pride in their work.

182. Teaching is very good overall, with two thirds of lessons seen very good or excellent. In such lessons, a variety of activities encourages participation in learning and develops critical skills. Teachers demonstrate up-to-date subject knowledge and give clear guidance to girls on the demands of the examinations. Lessons are conducted at a brisk pace and teachers set high expectations and use challenging questions. Assessment is frequent and the teachers' detailed comments enable girls to improve upon each piece of work. The enthusiasm of

teachers and the high quality teaching have been instrumental in the increase in student numbers in classical civilisation, with some continuing their study of the classical world to undergraduate level.

183. Leadership and management are very good. The subject leader has identified appropriate priorities for further development through her very thorough self-evaluation. Effective monitoring and regular communication, including a weekly classics newsletter, contribute to this clear vision for the future. Assessment is regular and consistently applied by all teachers; girls are very positive about the level of support they receive from their teachers. There are currently limited extra-curricular opportunities in school, but teachers give very good guidance on opportunities for girls to undertake in their spare time, such as summer Greek and Latin residential courses. Improvement since the previous inspection has been good.

Geography

Provision in geography is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results are outstanding, with one hundred per cent success a consistent feature.
- The quality of teaching and learning is excellent.
- The extent of student independence in their learning is exceptionally good.
- The range of teaching and learning styles is limited by old technology.

Commentary

184. Provision post-16 develops further the excellent work of the department seen in the main school. Remarkable and well above national average results are achieved consistently. For A-level there is one hundred per cent success in recent years and a rising point score total, which received an interpretation grade A* in 2004 when every candidate gained either Grade A or B. Advanced Subsidiary level results also produce total success consistently, though not with the same proportion of highest grades. This is because of the different nature of candidates, some with lower prior attainment and for whom geography is not their principal subject. These successes are the result of the skill, particularly in terms of examination preparation, and planning of the staff as well as the developing academic interest of able students. Consequently, achievement is outstanding and the value being added is significant and evident in the work as well as examination results.

185. The impact of the high quality teaching is reflected in the quality of work students produce. It is exemplary because it shows that students transfer what they have been taught into their own learning, do their own research and present their findings skilfully. This results from the desire to learn and the passion produced by able students. The policy on assessment, target setting and recording achievement is rigorous, leading to a clear understanding by students of where they currently stand and what needs then to be done to improve to the next grade. Fieldwork and the resumés on tests and investigative assignments are used very effectively to score high marks because students are encouraged to think their geography further.

186. The very high quality of teaching is stimulating and challenging. As in the main school, it reflects the high expectations and standards of the subject specialist staff, who are experienced practitioners. They expertly coach their students in the art of examination techniques to score the highest grades and in the need to differentiate between explanation, commentary, evaluation or review. Students develop intrinsic interest in

the subject leading to many proceeding to read geography at university. Lessons are carefully planned to develop interest, and the teaching is highly effective since it is matched to the needs of students and because the pace and challenge are rigorous.

187. Sustaining and extending all of this, to maintain the high performance, is now the main focus for the department. The range of teaching styles and ways in which students learn are intended to reach a higher level of operation through the planned use of the data projectors and whiteboards that are being introduced. Students are expected to participate fully to raise the level of sophistication in their understanding and skill, being able to relate concept to example more richly. Learning is a close reflection of the highly professional teaching – outstanding in its impact, showing a keenness to succeed and a record of a sophisticated level of appreciation. Students are highly developed as independent learners. They make their own notes, incorporating sophisticated statistical and presentational techniques in their writing. High grades are also attained because of the command of language, ability to use formulae and via information technology to plot, graph or map. Very good relationships and very high expectations lead to a passion for the subject in which concepts can be hotly debated, leading to a wider appreciation of the world and the issues it faces.
188. The leadership is excellent because there is a clear, shared vision and expectation for the subject at this level and a constant striving for highest achievement understood by students. Management is very good since administration is exemplary, with analysis of student performance and a well-constructed improvement plan which takes account of the findings. Fieldwork is a strong feature of the courses because of the experience and careful planning by the staff to maximise opportunity and benefit skill development. The department now has its first male student from the collaborative arrangement, and is recruiting girls from a wider area so that it is now a larger, even more thriving subject area. The issues identified at the previous inspection have been dealt with. Results, especially the point scores now being achieved, have risen substantially and one hundred per cent success is consistent – a performance to celebrate.

History

Provision in history is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- The high standards attained by students.
- Very good teaching is leading to very good learning.
- History is a very popular subject.

Commentary

189. Results at A-level are excellent. In 2004 all 36 students entered passed, and 89 per cent gained A or B grades. This was excellent achievement for these students, of whom 12 went on to study either history or related courses at university. In 2003 standards were also very high. History remains a very popular subject, with 61 students in the current Years 12 and 13. Observation of lessons and scrutiny of work confirm that the standards these students are attaining are very high, representing excellent achievement for them all.
190. Students are very committed and talk with enjoyment about the different history topics. In Year 13, they work very well independently on their personal investigations and clearly enjoy the opportunity to choose their own enquiry questions. These are well researched and, in many cases, show evidence of extensive reading. This is supported by the close links that the department has forged with university libraries.
191. Teaching is excellent and based on teachers' strong command of both the subject and of the assessment demands of the syllabus. Prominent features of this teaching are very good planning and questioning. In an excellent Year 13 lesson, for example, the teacher questioning, reviewing the effects of the 1867 reform act, enabled a weaker student to explain that politicians thereafter had to consider what the people wanted rather than what the people in power wanted. Teachers ensure that students acquire the necessary historical knowledge as quickly as possible so that the maximum amount of time can be spent thinking about and discussing it, so building deep understanding. Marking gives students very clear guidance on the strengths and weaknesses of their work. They are increasingly able to assess their own work accurately, clearly contributing to their very high standards. Relationships between students and teachers are excellent. Teachers create an atmosphere in lessons where good historical thinking is highly valued and students are confident enough to test out their own ideas and to take risks.
192. Leadership and management are excellent. Where issues have been identified through self-review, then prompt and appropriate action has been taken, such as the greater support now being given to Year 12 students. Teachers collaborate very effectively in their planning and work as a team. Opportunities for overlaps between different options are being well exploited, such as the similar attitudes to the outcome of the First World War in Italy and Germany in 1919 noted by Year 13 students.

Psychology

Provision in psychology is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Attainment in examinations is high compared with national averages.
- High standards and retention rates over the last three years have been consistent.
- Teaching and learning throughout the department are very good.
- Leadership and management are very good.
- Students make too little use of ICT other than typing up some essays.

Commentary

193. Psychology is one of the most popular subjects studied at A-level and students have consistently attained high grades compared with the national average since 2002. The best results over the three-year period were attained in 2004, with over 91 per

cent of the 21 students entered gaining grades A and B. Students' achievement in 2004 was outstanding when compared with their entry grades at GCSE. Most improved by two grades and two students gained a grade A who were originally predicted to get a grade E at A-level.

194. Most of the work seen on the AS and A-level courses comprises high quality responses reflecting a good level of analysis and drawing on a range of psychological theories. Many of the students' original target grades have been carefully adjusted to a higher level than would have been predicted by their GCSE attainment on entry to the course. The majority are on course to attain well above average at A-level in 2005. Students' understanding improves greatly over time. In one very good lesson, students drew accurately on different psychological states such as repression, regression and projection when explaining behaviour in a variety of contexts. In a recently completed essay, one high ability student wrote lucidly and accurately when comparing Piaget's and Kohlberg's theories of the development of moral understanding. Occasionally, they draw on knowledge from outside of the discipline, illustrating the depth of their understanding and capacity to set psychological theories in a broader context. Most students keep well-organised notes, which provide good sources of reference for future learning and revision. Their literacy skills are very good, but they make too little use of computers other than to type up essays. A small minority of students' files are not organised to the highest standard, and too few write bibliographies or references at the end of essays.
195. Students are self-motivated, very keen to do well and work hard. They clearly enjoy the subject. Most make a valuable and confident contribution within a good-humoured, rigorous atmosphere in the lessons. There is a very high retention rate. Moreover, students who may enter the subject late as a result of dropping out of another option, achieve very well by the end of the course. Students from ethnic minority backgrounds are well integrated and do equally well. Most A-level students continue on to higher education.
196. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers' knowledge of the subject, astute questioning and well-timed lessons enable the students to respond accurately and in depth, often drawing on ideas learned in earlier lessons. Lessons are prepared very thoroughly and include a good variety of tasks resulting in a fast pace of learning. Advice in lessons is constructive, and the annotated comments on students' work help them to improve their essay writing and test scores. The grades given are generally accurate, and reflect those that students would be given in the external exam. Theories and terminology are carefully explained and good use is made of past papers and model answers. These stimulate discussion and ensure that students focus sharply on the concepts being covered, providing them with a secure knowledge base to draw on when tested.
197. Leadership and management are very good, providing a pleasant working environment. Subject planning is well organised, securing a consistently high standard across lessons. Teachers work hard and are highly respected. As the result of the department's rigorous analyses and monitoring, students are set challenging targets, and most exceed the predicted grades they are expected to get by the time they reach the end of the A-level. The subject was not reported on at the last inspection.

Sociology

Provision in sociology is **excellent**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Results at A-level are very high in relation to the national average.
- Students achieve extremely well, and in most cases above predictions.
- Teaching overall is excellent.
- Students show very positive attitudes towards learning.
- Different groups of students and individuals within classes are catered for very well.

Commentary

198. Results both at AS and A-level in 2004 were very high compared to national averages, and represented an improvement on 2003's already impressive figures. Most students perform at levels above those indicated by their previous attainment, and are achieving very well.
199. The standards attained by current students are very high overall. Students are developing their study skills, such as note-taking, very well. Their powers of expression, both oral and written, are very good. They balance arguments relating to different sociological traditions and evaluate them effectively in relation to specific questions. Their discussion skills are highly developed: they argue a case presenting convincing illustrations, but also listen to and learn from each other's views.
200. Teaching and learning are excellent. Lesson planning is highly effective to include a variety of activities that engage students' interest and develop their knowledge and understanding of sociological theory and methods. The quality of handouts is extremely high, demonstrating comprehensive and up-to-date subject knowledge, and presenting concepts and information accessibly. Students' contributions to discussion are welcomed, and channelled effectively, particularly in directing students' attention towards examination requirements. In an excellent lesson on crime and ethnicity and their treatment by the media, the teacher handled controversial issues in a very sensitive way. He encouraged students to challenge "common sense" assumptions, and to take a critical view, for example, of the use of statistics. In particular, he enabled a class composed of students from a variety of ethnic backgrounds and ability to work extremely well together as a group. Students showed an impressive knowledge of contemporary issues, for example the Macpherson report on the murder of Stephen Lawrence, and their relevance to sociology. Students regularly receive constructive written and oral comments on their work, and are very appreciative of the help they are given both inside and outside class.
201. Leadership and management are both very good. There is a clear vision for the subject, and staff are ambitious to improve on the very high standards that they have already set. The performance of teachers and students alike is carefully monitored, and the results are used to improve provision even further. Departmental documents give a clear account of aims, objectives and policies, and set the subject firmly in a moral and ethical context, which is very much in keeping with the character of the school. Schemes of work are detailed regarding the coverage of topics and their timing, but do not include sufficient detail about resources that are available. Students benefit from visits by outside speakers, and are encouraged to make links between

sociology and what they are learning in other subjects, for example art and theology. Sociology has not previously been inspected.

ENGINEERING, TECHNOLOGY AND MANUFACTURING

Design and technology

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Standards of work are very high; students have an excellent understanding of design practice.
- Results are well above average and a high proportion of students gain A and B grades.
- Students achieve very well and make rapid progress.
- Lessons are planned exceptionally well and proceed at a rapid pace.
- Leadership and management of the course are excellent.

Commentary

202. Standards in the AS/A-level courses are very high. Results are well above average and the number of students studying the subject is continuing to rise. In recent years all students have achieved an A or B grade - 100 per cent compared to 43 nationally.
203. Attainment in lessons is well above average and standards are higher than at the time of the last inspection. All students make exceptional advances in knowledge, skills and understanding in the early stages of the course as, for example, in a Year 12 lesson on modelling design ideas. Students worked confidently using a wide range of techniques including vacuum forming, polymorph and foam board. All 11 students worked on a wide range of individual projects, including an electronic pepper mill and innovative designs for a baby beaker. Their understanding of the design and manufacturing process was very well developed even though students were only in the second term of the course.
204. As a result of excellent teaching students learn quickly and make rapid progress; they achieve very well. They take pride in producing high quality work under pressure and the analytical skills of the highest attaining students are very advanced. Lessons are exceptionally well planned and organised and because of this and the excellent relationships between staff and students, they have a strong impact on learning. High quality products are designed and made in the short amounts of time available. Teaching is rigorous in encouraging a mature approach to work and the attitudes of the students are very positive. There is a high level of individual support at all times and very challenging questions are asked in and out of lessons, such as in a very well researched blind tasting test for choux pastry. Teachers expect students to work hard with folders and written work assessed very thoroughly. They monitor shortfalls very

closely and take swift action when it is required. Students are very willing to explore and innovate, and enjoy creating new and unusual products.

205. The leadership and management of the courses are excellent. The head of department leads by example and, by monitoring the teaching and students' performance very closely, ensures that standards are maintained. Staff are kept well up to date with new ideas and developments and consequently very good use is made of ICT to research, analyse and record work in progress and evaluate finished products. A new graphics course is proving very popular and successful, illustrating that staff continually refine the way that the subject and individual units are taught.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

Art and design

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

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Students benefit from individual tuition.
- Responsible attitudes to learning and a desire to excel help students to achieve optimum potential.
- Teachers generously share their individual specialist subject skills for the benefit of students.
- Relationships are excellent. The inclusive ethos ensures all students feel valued.
- There is no dedicated sixth-form work base.

Commentary

206. In 2004, over two-thirds of students entered for A-level gained A or B grades and all students passed. This marks very good achievement. Students in Year 12 quickly adapt to sixth-form work and make outstanding progress. Students joining from other schools settle happily because of the welcoming and inclusive ethos in the department. In Year 13, students take much responsibility for their own learning and benefit from regular individual tutorials. Students and staff set high goals and strive for originality of thinking and new ways to communicate their ideas in visual form. Standards are very high. Students make intelligent use of sketchbooks for homework and to develop ideas in lessons. Drawing skills are very well developed, because teachers regularly teach on a step-by-step basis throughout the school, and students refine these in the sixth form.
207. Students benefit from organised visits to galleries, such as the Horniman museum to draw and research natural forms, and to the Tate Modern to develop ideas before commencing the A-level course. Students enjoy working from close observation and have attended external workshop events at the Royal Academy Outreach programme

and at Middlesex University. Year 13 attended an art tutorial with a contemporary artist, Kelly Bushell, on the ICT applications of Photoshop, a commercial graphics package to learn how electronic imagery is used and manipulated by artists, to enhance their work. Most students arrange their own programme of visits to galleries, out of school time, strengthening and developing their own ideas and skills. Many choose to work on controversial subject ideas, investigating issues which concern young people in contemporary society and reflecting themes encountered in religious studies and citizenship. These make a very good contribution to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural understanding, which is outstanding. They articulate ideas very well during lessons, using a very good range of technical terms, when discussing their own work and that of other artists.

208. Teaching and learning are excellent; individual tutorials are part of every lesson. Students receive excellent levels of written and verbal guidance and know what to do to improve. Teachers are excellent role models. The subject technician is well deployed and makes a good contribution to learning. Use of ICT is good.
209. Leadership is excellent and accounts for the good improvement since the last inspection. Management is very good. Relationships are excellent and this ensures a safe environment for students to test out their sometimes controversial ideas in a supportive ethos. There is no dedicated sixth form work base; this constrains students from completing work between lessons or during study periods.

Drama

Provision in drama is **very good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Teaching is well structured and enables students to develop improvisation and characterisation techniques.
- Students' attitudes to learning are very positive, particularly those of higher ability students.
- The assessment of Year 13 students' work is very detailed and helps them to improve their understanding of dramatic terms and techniques.
- The assessment of Year 12 students' work is insufficiently detailed.

Commentary

210. Standards by the end of Years 12 and 13 are well above the national average. The A-level results for students in 2004 were slightly lower than in 2003 but there is no evidence of a decline in overall standards in the subject. Evidence seen during the inspection indicates that standards in both years are well above the national average, and that students achieve very well.
211. Students enter Year 12 with attainment below the national average overall, since many come from other schools and have not studied drama before. They make very good progress in their understanding of dramatic terms and techniques. Year 13 students produced effective characterisations of individuals, based on an adaptation of

the play *Road* to a local situation. In written work, Year 13 students explored the social, historical and cultural influences on plays such as Stephen Berkoff's *East* in detail. They keep informative structured records, analysing how their roles changed in preparation and emerged in performance. Year 12 students took part enthusiastically in pair work based on the plays *My Mother Said I Never Should* and *Bazaar and Rummage*. They directed their partners in methods of presenting monologues based on their partner's character in plays that were unfamiliar to them. Higher ability Year 12 students introduced characters from their partner's plays while acting 'in role'. Lower ability Year 12 students made shorter, less effective presentations and were not fully able to maintain their roles. In their written work, higher ability Year 12 students described how an understanding of language, form and structure assisted their understanding of *Hedda Gabler*. Students of all abilities took part enthusiastically in 'warm up' and breathing exercises which enabled them to explore the use of space and the human voice in their work.

212. Teaching is very good as a result of the teacher's detailed subject knowledge and her ability to guide students through a series of linked dramatic activities. Learning is very good. Students developed their understanding of drama as they took part in activities ranging from warm-up exercises to directing exercises and dramatic presentations. The teacher made effective use of stimulus from the text in the lesson based on *Road* which helped to develop students' improvisation techniques in group work and presentations. The teacher's guidance also helped students to develop their own directing skills when assisting others. This guidance also gave students confidence when discussing his or her own and others' dramatic work. Students' written work in Year 13 has been assessed in line with the assessment objectives for the A-level syllabus and the detailed guidance provided has helped them to improve their work and set appropriate targets. Students' written work in Year 12 has been assessed with insufficient detail to provide students with appropriate guidance.
213. Extra-curricular provision in drama is very good. Year 12 students provide assistance with the Year 7 drama club and are taking part enthusiastically in a bi-annual school production in association with the music department. Year 12 and Year 13 students give annual presentations of their chosen plays to parents and have taken part in extra-curricular visits to the Theatre Museum and the National Theatre, while theatre groups have visited the school to present workshops on surrealism and the work of Stanislavsky.
214. Leadership is very good. Data are closely analysed by the drama teacher to ensure that appropriate targets are set for students. Progress since the previous inspection has been very good. Quality and standards of both provision and practice have improved.

BUSINESS

Economics

Provision in economics is **good**.

Main strengths and weaknesses

- Good teaching and very good working relationships make positive contributions to the students' high level of attainment.
- Pair work in lessons enables students to work co-operatively and to reflect on their learning.

- Teaching methods and students' learning are constrained by the lack of a designated economics classroom with ICT facilities.
- Some aspects of management, particularly documentation, are underdeveloped.

Commentary

215. In 2004 the A-level results were above the national average, as they were in 2003. In both years, all students gained a pass grade but a greater proportion gained the highest grades of A and B in 2004 than in 2003. Achievement is very good.
216. Standards are currently above average by Year 13. In a Year 12 lesson, whilst discussing why markets fail, students showed good understanding of government policies relating to external costs of production and consumption. In a Year 13 lesson, students discussed the relationship between levels of employment and inflation, drawing on past work and background reading. They demonstrated good ability to understand the graphical representation of this relationship when considering the Phillips Curve.
217. Teaching and learning are good. Students recognise that the expertise, enthusiasm and energy of their teacher and well-planned and structured lessons make a major contribution to their success. Lessons are conducted at a brisk and demanding pace. Through class discussion and pair work, students are given ample opportunity to work co-operatively, to reflect on their learning and develop thinking, analytical and oral skills. Relationships are very good. Students are motivated by the teacher's good use of humour and praise. Discussion is stimulated by good, topical written resources and challenging questioning by the teacher. Extensive use is made of graphs to illustrate economic concepts and to analyse and illustrate topics. Use of ICT is limited in lessons, but students are encouraged to gain access to the Internet in their own time to research topics and support revision, aiding the development of independent working skills. Students take a pride in their work and keep full and immaculate records of it. Work is regularly marked and the teacher monitors students' progress in relation to their prior attainment and target grades.
218. Leadership is good and management is satisfactory. The head of social sciences is responsible for economics but, in reality, the day-to-day leadership and management of the subject rest with the main teacher, who has a clear vision and sense of purpose. His aspirations for the students are high. However, he has senior responsibility in the school and, consequently, some aspects of management, particularly documentation, are underdeveloped. There is no specific subject handbook and detailed improvement plan. Schemes of work have not been developed from the examination board syllabus to indicate time scales, resources, teaching approaches and assessment procedures. The school is aware of this and is seeking to appoint another teacher of economics. Extra-curricular activities are limited but students value the opportunity to attend examination board revision conferences and, occasionally, conferences organised by the Institute for Economic Affairs. Performance data are well used to set targets. There is no discrete teaching room for economics and very limited access, during lesson time, to ICT facilities, such as an interactive whiteboard and computers. This limits teaching and learning styles.
219. There was no reference to economics in the last inspection but progress has been good over the past few years.

PART D: SUMMARY OF THE MAIN INSPECTION JUDGEMENTS

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

The leadership of other key staff	2	2
The effectiveness of management	1	1

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