

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS COUNCIL
(ISC)**

INSPECTION OF

ABINGDON SCHOOL

By the

**INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE
(ISI)**

on

April 25th – 29th, 2005

MAIN REPORT

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Abingdon School

The preparatory school, Josca's, was inspected at the same time and a separate report published.

Full Name of the School	Abingdon School		
DfES Number	316/0095		
Address	Park Road, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 1DE		
Telephone Number	01235 521563		
Fax Number	01235 849077		
E-mail Address	hm@abingdon.org.uk		
Name of Headmaster	Mark Turner		
Chairman of Governors	C.R.Dick		
Age Range	11-18	Gender	Boys
Number of Senior Pupils	797	Number of Boarders	131
Inspection Dates	25th-29th April 2005		

This inspection report follows the framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI). The inspection was carried out under the arrangements of the Independent Schools Council (ISC) Associations for the maintenance and improvement of the quality of their membership. It was also carried out under Section 163(1)(b) of the Education Act 2002, under the provisions of which the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has accredited ISI as the body approved for the purpose of inspecting schools belonging to ISC Associations and reporting on compliance with the Education (Independent School Standards) (England) Regulations 2003.

The inspection was not carried out in conjunction with the Commission for Social Care Inspection (CSCI) and the report does not contain specific judgements on the National Minimum Boarding Standards. It comments on the progress made by the school in meeting the recommendations set out in the most recent statutory boarding inspection and evaluates the quality of the boarding experience and its contribution to pupils' education and development in general.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. However, a school bursar visited the school and his comments have been incorporated into the report. The inspectors check the school's health and safety procedures and comment on any significant hazards they encounter: they do not carry out an exhaustive health and safety examination. Their inspection of the premises is from an educational perspective and does not include in-depth examination of the structural condition of the school, its services or other physical features.

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1. MAIN FINDINGS

Overall Summary

- 1.1 This high achieving school has an excellent balance in the education it provides through an outstanding and wide-ranging extra curricular programme and the high academic attainment, which enables boys to win places at highly selective universities. Examination results are very good. With effective pastoral care from housemasters, tutors and other staff, the personal development of pupils is of a high order. The school develops well-rounded, assured and articulate young people. Hard working staff contribute substantially to boys' education. The school works closely with Josca's Preparatory School and with St Helen's and St Katharine's, the neighbouring girls' school. The pupils also benefit from a pleasant environment and very good relationships with their teachers. The school's accommodation and premises support the quality of education but further improvements in sporting facilities will strengthen this area. A more rigorous implementation of appraisal will benefit the teachers.

What the School Does Well

- 1.2 The school is strong in many respects but the most notable are listed below:
- The quality of education is greatly enhanced by an excellent programme of extra curricular activities, known as 'the other half'.
 - High levels of academic achievement allow boys to secure places at highly selective universities.
 - The dedicated and highly qualified staff make a very good all round contribution to boys' education.
 - The school provides very good information and communications technology (ICT) facilities.
 - Learning support is high quality.
 - Personal development is of a high order. All the above, along with effective pastoral care from housemasters, tutors and other staff, contribute to this. The school is rightly proud of the boys' development.

What the School Should Do Better

- 1.3 The school has very few weaknesses but is aware of the following issues:
- Some of the school accommodation and sporting provision could be improved.
 - Staff performance could be enhanced by more rigorous implementation of the appraisal system and the increased sharing of good teaching practices.
 - A curriculum review is needed to iron out some anomalies.

Standards of Attainment and Progress in Subjects

- 1.4 Attainment and progress, in relation to pupils' ages, abilities and circumstances and at each stage of the school, are very good. Results in GCSE over the past three years have been good and are above those for maintained selective schools, especially at grades A*/A. In 2004, all pupils gained at least seven GCSE grades A* to C. Results at A-level have been very good, well above those for maintained selective schools. The proportion of A and B grades awarded has risen steadily to over four-fifths. Nationally standardised measurements

indicate that, during the last three years, progress to GCSE has been good and to A-levels very good. Progress in nearly all A level subjects and in a third of GCSE subjects in 2004 compared favourably with that in similar schools. In many of the lessons, and in much of the written work, attainment and progress was very good. In relatively few lessons were they less than sound or appropriate. Many pupils achieve places at the more competitive universities. The achievement and progress in relation to ability of boys receiving learning support is good.

The Quality of Pupils' Learning, Attitudes and their Behaviour

- 1.5 The quality of pupil's learning attitudes and behaviour is very good. The quality of learning is good and much of it is very good. As pupils go through the school they develop in independence and increasingly show the ability to think, write and argue independently. The school's ethos of high academic aspirations informs pupil confidence, self-esteem and endeavour. In the classroom, pupils were observed reasoning, solving problems and applying their knowledge effectively. With appropriate stimulus, pupils take an active and engaged part in the lessons resulting in cogent and critical discussion. Attitudes in the school are very positive. The pupils have a strong belief in the school and its ethos and there is particular enthusiasm for 'the other half'. The standard of behaviour is very good both in and out of the classroom. There is an atmosphere of mutual respect between pupils and between pupils and their teachers.

The Quality of Teaching

- 1.6 Teaching is good. In a significant proportion of lessons it is very good or excellent. A very small proportion was sound or unsatisfactory, the latter due either to poor classroom control or insufficient opportunity for pupils to participate. Teaching contributes to the quality of pupils' attainment and progress at all stages of their educational development and is a key factor in encouraging independent learning. Teachers demonstrate secure knowledge and are highly skilled. Expert responses to pupils' questions contribute to a culture of scholarship and learning. Teachers show commitment to the preparation of their lessons, which are purposeful and focused. Teaching methods often seek to engage the active participation of pupils and this promotes independent learning. Relationships between staff and pupils are warm and respectful and high standards of courtesy and consideration are observed. This enables easy and effective management of all activities, and an educational partnership, the fruits of which are evident in the quality of the citizens which the school turns out.

Other Aspects of the School

Attendance

- 1.7 The level of pupils' attendance is very good. Admissions registers comply with statutory requirements. Unauthorised absence over the period of the Lent term 2005 was nil. Authorised absence during the same period was 3%. Attendance registers are completed efficiently and meet statutory requirements. The twice-daily registration procedures are careful and thorough. Allowing for the difficulties of transport to and around Abingdon, most pupils arrive at school on time and the five-minute gap between lessons allows enough time for movement around the school. However, instances of unpunctuality for lessons were observed.

Assessment and Recording

- 1.8 The quality of assessment and recording is good. In some subjects it is very good. In general, the school systems for assessment and recording are good. Most departments follow the

whole school assessment process, which provides much data on pupil attainment and progress through the use of half-termly report cards. However, in some departments, despite statements in the handbooks, school and departmental policies are not always implemented consistently. Even where it is thorough and does largely reflect school policy, assessment of pupils work does not always inform learning. In many cases it is summative only. In other cases, the depth and quality of comment constitutes more helpful assessment for learning. Prep is a valuable vehicle for assessment of pupils. Marking of prep is generally frequent and well done. It is particularly impressive in classics, English and music. It can, however, vary between lower, middle and upper school and between members of the same department. Where heads of department monitor the process, such inconsistencies do not occur. At its best, accurate assessment and its conscientious recording contribute most effectively to curriculum planning and development.

Curriculum

- 1.9 The curriculum is good and offers a broad and balanced education for all pupils. The school has a very strong academic ethos and the curriculum contributes to pupils' intellectual attainment. Good planning for continuity and progression ensure that courses are appropriate for the age and ability of pupils. All pupils have equal access to the curriculum. Learning support is very good and the needs of the more able pupils are recognised through the provision of extension activities. The academic curriculum is strongly supported and enriched by the many and varied extra curricular opportunities available through 'the other half'. Links with St Helen and St Katharine and the extensive sporting programme further enhance the pupils' education. A planned curriculum review will consider ways of dealing with the few anomalies.

Teaching and Non-teaching Staff

- 1.10 The overall quality of the teaching and non-teaching staff is very good. Teachers are well qualified and a good range of experience enables them to play a full part in every aspect of school life. Allowance is made on the timetable for those with managerial responsibilities and the deployment of staff is fair and effective. Support staff make an invaluable contribution in many areas of school life and have a strong sense of loyalty to the school. The policies in place for induction, appraisal, and in-service training for teaching staff are good, and non-teaching staff have their own programme of appraisal. Teacher appraisal has currently fallen behind schedule.

Resources for Learning

- 1.11 Resources for learning are very good. Many departments make good use of the televisions and DVD players within their classrooms. Almost all departments have a good range of books, both for class use and for reference within the department and in the library. ICT resources are very good. Two dedicated computer suites together with additional suites in several departments provide excellent support for learning and teaching. Many teachers and pupils use the resources effectively and some notably so. A general atmosphere of positive enthusiasm for ICT prevails.

Libraries

- 1.12 The school's library provision and use are very good. The main library is both well stocked and sufficiently spacious for a school of this size and is complemented by a number of departmental libraries. The full-time librarian is qualified, energetic and enthusiastic, and well supported by boy librarians. The library is particularly popular with middle school boys at lunchtime. ICT provision is good and the computers are heavily used.

Premises and Accommodation

- 1.13 Premises are very good and the accommodation is good. The recently completed new developments significantly enhance creative education at Abingdon. The older buildings are well maintained inside and out, though internal alterations and additions have created more staircases and corridors. The size, number, refurbishment and location of the teaching and support rooms vary greatly between departments; all, except the sporting facilities, are at least satisfactory and some are very good. Despite the very good and valued work of learning support, the department is in a remote location with insufficient space. The planted areas provide a green oasis of calm for the pupils.

Links with Parents and the Community

- 1.14 The quality of links with parents and the wider community is very good. Detailed and informative reports are regularly sent to parents as are newsletters which keep them aware of what is happening and encourage them to feel part of the life of the school. The Amey Theatre is central to much activity involving local people in music and drama productions. Service to the community is part of the ethos of the school and manifests itself in the provision of help in local schools, visiting the elderly, and making substantial contributions to a variety of charities and environmental work.

Pupils' Personal Development

- 1.15 The personal development of pupils is very good. Pupils of all ages use the diverse opportunities provided to enrich their personal, social and cultural development. The school's aim of offering opportunities for life in the fullest sense are fulfilled in the wide range of activities through which pupils can develop spiritual awareness and a moral code, as well as developing appropriately personally, socially and culturally. A high quality and diversity of experiences are provided through the chapel, the curriculum, and 'the other half'. Pastoral structures and the Personal, Social, Health and Citizenship Education [PSHCE] programme support pupils in building positive relationships, in taking responsibility for their own learning and in developing as responsible citizens. Pupils learn about their own cultural traditions and the richness and diversity of others not only through the school curriculum but through a host of trips, excursions, and exchanges. The school provides very good education and guidance to prepare boys for higher education and future careers. At each stage they are offered appropriate personal guidance and teaching in a department which makes good use of information technology and a good deal of help from outside.

Pastoral Care

- 1.16 Pastoral care is very good and is an important part of the school's vision for the all-round education for each pupil. Parents report that boys are happy and secure. Pupils are well catered for in their house and tutor group and a wide range of material is available on personal and social issues for use in tutor time. Each year group has a weekly assembly and a chapel service. An extensive general studies programme enhances boys learning at sixth form level. Appropriate policies are in place on child protection and welfare to ensure pupil well being. The variety and quality of food in school is good. Boarding makes a very positive contribution to the life of the school and sense of community. Health and safety is managed and monitored in a way which ensures sensible compliance with the relevant regulations. The headmaster chairs a safety committee, which reports to the governing body. Appropriate health and safety policies are in place and written risk assessments are prepared as necessary. Training is focused on key personnel. A comprehensive database is maintained in the school health centre, allowing accurate medical information about pupils to

be made available, as appropriate, to health professionals and other responsible persons.
Governance and Management

- 1.17 Governance and management are good and in some respects very good. Governors are distinguished, enthusiastic, supportive and generally well informed. Both the chairman and the headmaster are relatively new and changes are being made. The senior management team (SMT) works hard and gives the headmaster good support, though some restructuring is occurring which may improve communications further. The thorough systems of committees for both governors and school management are well designed to meet the needs of the school. The headmaster provides good strong leadership and works well with the headmaster of Josca's. That financial management, under a much respected bursar and chairman of finance, is effective and produces surpluses, which help to fund the new development, was confirmed by a visiting bursar. Planning is very good and developments have been designed to enhance educational provision at Josca's and on the sports side at Abingdon. Good cooperation has been fostered with SHSK. Most of the management by heads of department and housemasters is good

Achievement and Quality in Activities ('the other half')

- 1.18 The quality of activities is excellent. 'The other half' extra - curricular programme makes a major contribution to school life and offers pupils opportunities to experience a very good range of activities. All pupils participate in a minimum of two sessions of physical activity each week. Pupils achieve very high standards in the activities observed. 'The other half' is very effectively managed and contributes very significantly to the personal development of pupils. Participation levels and the contribution made towards pupils' educational experience are both very high. All members of the academic staff are highly committed to 'the other-half' programme.

Progress Made by the School since its Last Inspection

- 1.19 Curricular liaison between Josca's and Abingdon School is now strong and the curriculum content of work in Years 7 and 8 is in line where this is sensible. The school continues to refurbish and up-grade the boarding accommodation. Daily registration procedures for day boys now conform with statutory requirements. Health and safety matters are attended to efficiently. A whole school INSET and appraisal policy has been developed but this could be further strengthened. INSET for child protection is provided, along with training in ICT, though further professional development in ICT is needed in some departments.

Compliance with the Regulations for Registration

DfES Standard		Does the school meet the regulatory requirements?
1. Quality of education:	1.(2) Curriculum	Yes
	1.(3)-(5) Teaching	Yes
2. Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils		Yes
3. Welfare, health and safety of pupils		Yes
4. Suitability of proprietors and staff		Yes
5. Premises and accommodation		Yes
6. Provision of information		Yes

Actions Required for Compliance with the Regulatory Requirements

- 1.20 No action is required. The school is asked to address any issues highlighted in *What the School Should Do Better*. These are set out as recommendations for the school in Section 2 of the report.

2. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 The report contains a number of points of action but the following are the main recommendations that follow from the shortcomings identified in paragraph 1.3. The numbers in brackets refer to relevant paragraphs in the body of the report.

R1 Some of the school accommodation and sporting provision should be improved. These needs have been identified in the development plan but delay has been caused in part by the process for planning permission. [1.13, 1.17, 5.38, 5.41, 5.43, 8.135]

R2 Staff performance could be improved by more rigorous implementation of the appraisal system and the sharing of good teaching practices. This includes the expansion of mutual lesson observation and of professional development. [1.10, 5.22, 5.23, 8.10]

R3 A curriculum review is needed to resolve the few anomalies. [5.12, 5.18, 8.134]

3. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 3.1 The school was rebuilt on the present site in 1870 but it traces its origins and its links with the great Benedictine Abbey of Abingdon back to the 13th century. The monastery was dissolved in 1538 but the school was re-endowed in 1563 by an old boy, John Roysse, who was also a Mercer. Close links with the Mercers' Company remain to the present day. The Christian foundation is an important element in the school ethos and all boys attend chapel at least once a week. However, pupils of all faiths and social backgrounds are welcomed. The school was on the direct grant list and later was influential in support of the assisted places scheme, and now over a hundred boys receive some financial help. Although Abingdon is principally a day school its boarding element remains strong and 135 of the 800 pupils are boarders, about half are from overseas. Abingdon is a single-sex boys' school but in recent years close collaboration with the girls at the school of St Helen and St Katharine (SHSK) has added some benefits of co-education.
- 3.2 The school is set in thirty acres of grounds, not far from the centre of the historic town. A further 30 acres of playing fields are located at Frilford, adjoining the grounds of Josca's, Abingdon's junior school. The school has its own sports hall, swimming pool (open-air) and a new boathouse on the River Thames. The school has steadily added to the Victorian and Edwardian buildings, which include School House, Big School and the chapel. Among the recent additions are the science block, the Amey Theatre, the arts centre and Mercer's Court which houses the school administration. The development plan includes a new sports complex with an indoor swimming pool. The whole campus provides a pleasant and peaceful environment well suited to education and supports the school philosophy that "education is a civilising activity to be conducted in civilising surroundings".
- 3.3 The junior school, Josca's, which merged with Abingdon in 1998, has around 200 pupils, most of whom move on to the senior school in Year 9. Abingdon admits boys in Years 7, 9 and 12. So for two Years 7 and 8 there are parallel groups at Josca's and Abingdon. These were inspected at the same time but reported separately. The senior school has 256 of the 800 students in the sixth form. At all stages of entry, the school is selective and the ability of pupils is high. All pupils take nationally standardised tests in Year 7 and the results show that all but a handful of pupils are above average in verbal, quantitative and non-verbal tests. The average score in a baseline test of ability and norm referenced against all schools is 127, and 110 against other independent schools. The average IQ is around 115. In 2004, in Year 9, comparisons of ability with other independent schools show that Abingdon has a third of its boys in the A quartile, a third in the B quartile, a quarter in the C quartile and a handful in the D quartile. Similar or better outcomes were seen in earlier years. As a result of this analysis comparisons of performance were made with maintained selective schools. An average of 20 boys left after GCSE in the last three years but they are replaced by equally able students who have a minimum of three A and 2 B grades at GCSE. Around 180 pupils are on a learning support register. Virtually all the pupils go on to higher education, including about 25 a year to Oxford or Cambridge.
- 3.4 While the academic ethos of the school is very strong, a programme of extra curricular activities, known as 'the other half', has broadened this ethos. The school has an international reputation for rowing. For pastoral purposes and for the PSHCE programme, the school is divided into lower, middle and upper school. The boys belong to a house, one of six day houses and three boarding houses, and to a tutor group. The second master oversees the system.

- 3.5 National Curriculum nomenclature is used throughout this report to refer to year groups in the school. The year group nomenclature used by the school and its National Curriculum (NC) equivalence are shown in the following table:

School	NC
1st Form	Year 7
2 nd Form	Year 8
3 rd Form	Year 9
4 th Form	Year 10

School	NC
5 th Form	Year 11
Lower Sixth	Year 12
Upper Sixth	Year 13.

Key Indicators

- 3.6 GCSE

	Most recently completed Year 11	Average for the last <i>three</i> years
Entered for 5+ subjects (%)	100	100
Achieved 5+ @ A* - C (%)	100	100
Achieved 5+ @ A* - G (%)	100	100
Average score per candidate*	66.1	65.3
Average score per entry*	6.9	6.8

* Scoring is 8 for GCSE grade A*, 7, 6, 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 for grades A – G.

- 3.7 A Level and AS

	Most recent Year 13	Average for the last <i>three</i> years
Average score per candidate	33.6	32.9
Average score per subject entry	8.4	8.3

Scoring is 10, 8, 6, 4, 2 for A level grades A – E, and 5, 4, 3, 2, 1 for AS grades A to E.

- 3.8 Attendance for Lent Term 2005

	Authorised	Unauthorised
Percentage absence	3%	0%

- 3.9 Exclusions Over the Previous 12 Months

Temporary exclusions	Permanent exclusions
5	1

4. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and Progress

- 4.1 Attainment and progress are very good, in relation to pupils' ages, abilities and circumstances. In most of the lessons observed and in most of the written work scrutinised, attainment and progress were either good or very good. In relatively few lessons observed were attainment and progress less than sound and appropriate for pupils' abilities.
- 4.2 Results in GCSE examinations over the past three years have been good and the standards achieved are above those for maintained selective schools, especially at grades A*/A. In 2004, eight subjects achieved excellent results with over three-quarters of pupils gaining A* and A grades and all pupils gaining at least seven GCSE grades A* to C. Results at A-level have been very good. They are consistently well above the standards achieved in maintained selective schools and especially so in geography, history, Latin, music and physics. The proportion of A and B grades has risen steadily in the last three years from three-quarters to over four-fifths of the grades awarded. In 2004, no pupil failed A level. Attainment at AS level similarly has been very good. Almost all pupils passed during the last three years with some three quarters of the pupils achieving A and B grades. In 2004, every pupil taking AS art or Greek gained an A grade.
- 4.3 The number of pupils gaining places for courses at the more competitive universities is relatively high and exemplifies the high standards achieved by many pupils.
- 4.4 The attainment seen in lessons and in pupils' written work was very good and commensurate with the standards achieved in public examinations, especially in Years 12 and 13. In over four-fifths of the lessons observed attainment, relative to ages and abilities, was at least good, often very good and sometimes excellent. In almost every subject, attainment in the written work scrutinised was very good. Pupils achieve high levels of competence in literacy, numeracy and the use of ICT. All pupils in Year 9 take and pass a nationally recognised computer literacy qualification. The work in class, at its best, stretches the most able effectively as well as those with more modest ability, in the school's terms, achieve well. Pupils requiring additional learning support or tuition in English as an additional language (EAL) make very good progress in most subjects. Examples of very good work in pupils' written, oral and practical work occur in each subject and age group. Some exceptionally fine sixth form work was noted in classics and physics, reaching undergraduate standard.
- 4.5 Pupils make rapid progress in their written work in almost all subjects. In lessons also pupils almost always make at least appropriate and often rapid progress relative to their ages and abilities. Nationally standardised measurements indicate that progress to both GCSE and A levels has improved in the last three years. Pupils performed above expectations when compared with pupils of similar ability in other comparable schools in roughly one third of the GCSE subjects in 2004. However, pupils performed significantly below expectations in biology, art, religious education and economics. At A level, pupils performed above expectations in nearly all subjects in 2004.
- 4.6 Very good attainment is evident in the creative and performing arts and in business and sporting competitions. Those who are gifted academically or who are talented in music, sport or the arts are given the scope and support to achieve their best and reach the highest level of which they are capable; the achievements of the rowers are remarkable in this respect. Most pupils make effective use of the opportunities provided to develop their gifts and talents.

Quality of Pupils' Learning, Attitudes and Behaviour

- 4.7 The quality of pupils' learning, attitudes and behaviour, taken together, is very good.
- 4.8 The quality of pupils' learning, specifically, is good and much of it is very good. As pupils go through the school, they increasingly show the ability to think, write and argue independently. In the classroom, pupils are able to reason, solve problems and apply their knowledge effectively. With appropriate stimulus, pupils take an active and engaged part in cogent and critical discussion. Examples of pupils' independent thought and critical argument were heard in a number of classes; in A level biology, discussing the question of whether DNA was always a double helix, in A level physics, in an informal revision group working co-operatively and developing excellent critical thinking skills, and in religious studies with consideration of teleological and normative ethics.
- 4.9 Pupils' attitudes are very good. The school's ethos of high academic aspirations informs pupil confidence, self-esteem and endeavour. The atmosphere of the school is friendly, purposeful and achieving. Pupils relate well to each other and to their teachers. In class pupils support each other and listen to each others' contributions with care and respect. This was particularly evident in a mock electioneering sixth form assembly, where the presentation and reception of lively pre-election political ideas was particularly good. Attitudes in the school are very positive with pupils aiming to achieve high standards. Pupils believe in the school's ethos and are particularly enthusiastic about 'the other half'. In some of these activities boys make a particularly valuable and selfless contribution to the local community.
- 4.10 The standard of behaviour is very high both in and out of the classroom. Pupils are well mannered and courteous, and wear their uniform well. The school encourages an atmosphere of mutual respect and support between pupils and with their teachers.

Attendance

- 4.11 The level of pupils' attendance is very good. . Admissions registers comply with statutory requirements and are kept on a database in the registry and printed out as required. Unauthorised absence over the period of the Lent term 2005 was nil. Authorised absence during the same period was 3%. Attendance registers are completed efficiently and now meet statutory requirements. When a pupil is absent, parents usually telephone but, if not, the school telephones the parents.
- 4.12 Allowing for the difficulties of transport to and around Abingdon, most pupils arrive at school on time. Latecomers report to the common-room secretary. However a few instances of unpunctuality for lessons were observed which were not met with appropriate sanctions.

Does the school meet the regulatory requirements for admission and attendance registers?

- 4.13 Yes.

5. QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

- 5.1 The quality of teaching is good. In a significant proportion of lessons it is very good or occasionally excellent. A very small proportion was sound or unsatisfactory; the latter was usually due to poor classroom control or to failing to allow pupils to participate in the lesson.
- 5.2 Teaching meets the needs of all pupils and contributes to the high quality of pupils' attainment and progress at all stages of their educational development; it is a key factor in encouraging independent learning.
- 5.3 Teachers demonstrate secure knowledge and are highly skilled, often engaging in their subject with an infectious enthusiasm which is transmitted to the pupils. Expert responses to pupils' questions contribute to the culture of scholarship and learning. Teachers show considerable commitment to the preparation of their lessons, which are purposeful and focused.
- 5.4 Lessons are characterised by high expectations which seek to stimulate interest and to challenge pupils to deepen their knowledge and understanding.
- 5.5 Teaching methods often seek ways to engage the active participation of pupils and this does much to promote independent learning. The pace of teaching is often rapid. Even when it appears to be more relaxed, it can conceal a deepening of understanding, which emerges later as formidable intellectual development. This is manifested in the pupils' grasp of challenging concepts and ideas. Not all teaching methods are successful: where teachers dominate the lesson throughout, opportunities for independent learning are reduced and pupils make less progress. The pace of most lessons is very good; time is rarely wasted and resources are used to good effect.
- 5.6 The relationships between teaching staff and pupils are warm and respectful and high standards of courtesy and consideration are observed. This leads to easy and effective management of all activities and contributes to an educational partnership, the fruits of which are evident in the quality of the citizens which the school turns out.

Does the school meet the regulatory requirements for teaching?

- 5.7 Yes.

Assessment and Recording

- 5.8 The quality of assessment and recording is good. In some subjects it is very good. In general, the system for assessment and recording is good. Teachers in most departments follow the whole school assessment policy. In these cases, frequent and effective assessment and recording, which also includes internal examinations and unit assessments, enables pupils' progress to be monitored within departments. For each pupil, the half termly report card system collates assessment data from across the school along with 'other half' activities. This gives a broader picture of a pupil's progress and contributes to the identification of high achievers as well as those in need of learning support. Many departments ensure pupils are aware of and understand the system of assessment and recording by inserting this into the front of exercise books and files. However, in some departments, despite statements in their own departmental handbooks, school and even departmental policies are not always implemented consistently. In such cases, even where it is thorough and does largely reflect school policy, assessment of pupils' work may not always inform learning.

- 5.9 Prep is set effectively by most teachers and is a valuable vehicle for assessment. Marking of prep is generally frequent and well done. Many subject teachers assess pupils' work methodically and continuously and records of attainment and commendations are well kept, particularly in history, physics, classics, English and music. Assessment procedures can vary between lower, middle and upper school, between members of the same department and even within the marking of a single teacher. Where heads of department monitor the process such inconsistencies do not occur.
- 5.10 At its best, accurate assessment and its conscientious recording contributes most effectively to curriculum development and planning, for example in design and technology, art and particularly so in geography coursework, based on examination board criteria. In many departmental meetings, discussion of such marking leads to changes in curriculum provision and practice. The learning support department is also helped in the construction of provision for EAL pupils and those with learning difficulties.

Curriculum

- 5.11 The curriculum provided by the school is good. It is broad and balanced, allowing pupils to experience a wide range of subjects. It contributes effectively to pupils' intellectual and physical development and is appropriate for their ages and abilities. It prepares pupils well for their future life.
- 5.12 In the lower school, the study a broad range of subjects allows pupils' potential to be developed well. For example, in Years 7 and 8, boys take Latin in addition to a modern foreign language, and an introductory science course. In Year 9, pupils can add another language and the three areas of science are taught separately. The teaching time allocated to subjects is generally satisfactory but, in Years 7 and 8, lack of time for practical and creative subjects affects continuity and progression. Time lost for changing in single period PE lessons, in Year 9, hampers development of skills. The good provision for ICT helps pupils in Year 9 working towards a CLAIT certificate.
- 5.13 Good use is made of setting, particularly in mathematics, science and modern languages. The curriculum allows pupils in Years 10 and 11 to choose their GCSE options from a wide range of subjects, including a number of languages, modern and classical but English literature is not offered at GCSE.
- 5.14 For A level, pupils can choose from over twenty subjects. Pupils usually study four subjects in Year 12, and three subjects in Year 13, although a number of pupils take five and four subjects respectively. The compulsory general studies programme in Year 12 makes a major contribution to the curriculum at that level and could be extended into Year 13. At A level, some subjects are taught in conjunction with the School of St Helen and St Katharine, and this has complication for the timetable and for the structure of the school day.
- 5.15 Equality of access and opportunity exists for all pupils. Learning support is very good and the needs of the more able pupils are recognised through extension activities in, for example, biology, economics and business studies and history. The fact that all pupils are able to participate in sport regardless of ability was highlighted by pupils as a feature of the school.
- 5.16 PSHCE is taught weekly in all age groups, covering a wide range of personal, social, moral and cultural issues. It includes elements of citizenship. Pupils are well supported by an effective careers programme and they receive very good guidance in their application to university.

- 5.17 The academic curriculum is strongly supported and enriched by the many and varied extra curricular opportunities available in 'the other half'. The extensive sporting programme, together with the large number of overseas trips organised by many departments, and visits to museums, theatres and concerts more locally, further enhance the pupils' education. Pupils enter national competitions in many curriculum areas including chemistry, physics, geography, mathematics and music.
- 5.18 Although the curriculum is good, it has not been reviewed recently, and a review of curriculum and the structure of the school day and week are rightly included in the current school development plan. Some of the anomalies can then be corrected.

Does the school meet the regulatory requirements for the curriculum?

- 5.19 Yes.

Teaching and Non-teaching Staff

- 5.20 The overall quality of teaching and non-teaching staff is very good. Teachers are well qualified. Many are graduates of distinguished universities and a significant number have higher degrees. A good spread of age and experience brings further benefits; twelve teachers are under thirty and twenty two between fifty and sixty. Turnover of staff is steady, with most of those who leave gaining promotion. Teachers play a full part in every aspect of school life. Allowance is made on the timetable for those with managerial responsibilities and the deployment of staff is fair and effective. Non-teaching staff make an invaluable contribution in many areas of school life and have a strong sense of loyalty to the school.
- 5.21 The school provides induction for newly qualified teachers (NQTs) under the Independent Schools Council Teacher Induction Programme and all the statutory requirements are met. All induction is co-ordinated by the professional tutor, who supports and assesses new members of staff in their professional function, particularly but not exclusively in their classroom teaching. She is involved in planning and co-ordinating the induction day for all new members of staff and liaises with senior staff as necessary.
- 5.22 The appraisal scheme is appropriately designed and is intended to operate on a biennial cycle. The programme includes lesson observations and targets should be set. For some, the system clearly works very well. Some heads of department devote considerable time to their appraisals and to lesson observation but the programme for appraising heads of department and housemasters is not working as intended. Six members of staff due to be appraised in 2003/4 have yet to have their appraisal, while for 2004/5, the figure is twelve. Senior managers have not been appraised recently. The non-teaching staff appraisal scheme organised by the bursar is running smoothly at present.
- 5.23 Much valuable in-service training is organised. The school holds regular training days and is currently running a large number of ICT training courses designed for all levels of ability. The training budget for 2004/5 of £16,100 is not large for a school of this size, but the training needs of staff are being met. Most training is related to subject or examination needs and relatively few staff go on courses relating to issues of school management or other wider issues of professional development.
- 5.24 Technicians and educational support staff are well qualified to serve the needs of the school, although the laboratory technicians are not available on Saturdays. The smooth arrangements for school catering, the absence of litter, and the general condition of the campus are further tributes to the efficiency of the non-teaching staff.

5.25 CRB and other required checks have been carried out for all teaching and non-teaching staff.

Does the school meet the regulatory requirements for the suitability of proprietors and staff?

5.26 Yes.

Resources for Learning

5.27 Resources for learning are very good. The quantity, quality and organisation of books, equipment and materials support the teaching and learning and recreation of the pupils at all stages.

5.28 Departments are well resourced as adequate budgets allow departments to purchase the books and equipment they need, although in a few departments, for example religious studies, audio-visual resources are limited. Several departments have developed worksheets particularly for use with pupils who require learning support. Almost all departments have a departmental library and the best contain a wide range of books and magazines which are used for research by pupils. Subscriptions to journals, such as those in economics and business studies and modern languages, ensure that pupils have access to up to date material. Many departments make good use of televisions and DVD players within their classrooms, particularly in history, geography, mathematics and English.

5.29 Practical equipment in all three science departments is very good and is well maintained by the technicians. In art and technology a very good range of materials and machinery is available. The provision of musical instruments is very good, especially the large number of pianos available to day boys and boarders for practice. Resources for PE and games are good and the school minibuses transport pupils safely to sport fixtures and on other trips.

ICT

5.30 The ICT resources supporting teaching and learning are very good. The school has nearly 400 computers, very many of which are available to pupils. Two suites are capable of accommodating entire classes and ten additional suites are variously located around the school, including the library. The sixth form has no dedicated ICT facility. Good use is made of the interactive whiteboards in six departments and of the projectors in all departments. The online learning resources and study sites, already good, are being developed continually, encouraging pupils and parents to access information from beyond the school. Most departments make very effective use of the ICT facilities available, including art, music and physics, but a few have yet to use ICT appropriately to enhance learning within their subject areas. Even so, a general atmosphere of positive enthusiasm exists for ICT and the school's strategic vision for ICT is centred on the promotion of effective learning.

Libraries

5.31 The use of the school's library provision is very good. The main library is both well stocked and sufficiently spacious for a school of this size and is complemented by departmental libraries. The full-time, qualified librarian is both energetic and enthusiastic and the library teems with middle school boys at lunchtime. The librarian is sensitive to the need to develop appropriate use of ICT within the library. ICT provision is good and the computers are heavily used.

- 5.32 The library is located at the heart of the school. A good range of 16,000 books meets both the educational and the recreational needs of the pupils and is supported by a comprehensive range of newspapers, magazines and journals, a collection of audio tapes, and DVDs. The number of resources provided is above nationally recommended guidelines. Each year the librarian and departmental heads meet to discuss the library budget for their department for the following year. Where pupils' needs are better met by books being stored departmentally, such as in music, this is done. It is planned to catalogue departmental libraries using the same format as the main library; this would be hugely beneficial.
- 5.33 The library arrangement is both practical and successful. The library is particularly popular at lunchtime, when a relaxed but purposeful atmosphere prevails and boys read, study, and use the fourteen computers. Study places are sufficient for a school of this size.
- 5.34 The library is open throughout the school day for individual pupils and also available for class use. Boarders from School House may study there in the evening, but staffing constraints still do not allow access by other boarders. Library service begins for pupils in Year 8 and often continues for the remainder of their school career. The librarian has the invaluable part-time assistance of one member of the English department, but the lack of any further assistance currently precludes the extension of opening hours. A team of pupil librarians provides excellent support. They assist in all aspects of the work, except for cataloguing, and are trained in the use of the new electronic management system. Work in the library is recognised as an activity in 'the other half'; in addition, status is enhanced by the award of a tie and long standing librarians are awarded prizes for service.
- 5.35 The librarian actively promotes programmes of study skills and also local liaison. Three independent and three state schools in Abingdon have formed a partnership, which meets every half term. The librarians organise an annual event *Shadowing the Carnegie* to promote enjoyment of reading. In June 2004, the Abingdon school librarian, in conjunction with the librarian from John Mason School, gave a presentation on working partnerships to a conference in Dublin.

Premises and Accommodation

- 5.36 Premises are very good and accommodation is good. The school's grounds and buildings blend well together despite a century of development. The school is mostly on one site though some games take place on Cox's fields at Frilford. Overall, it is a stimulating educational environment that helps to enrich the learning of the pupils. The pupils enjoy extensive areas of green spaces some of which are formally laid as gardens blossoming with an abundance of plants. Seating is provided for pupils to enjoy the tranquillity and any formal games being played. The two gardeners work hard to maintain the public areas and the absence of litter and graffiti is creditable. The school's 35 acres, along with Albert Park, create a rural oasis in this location close to the centre of the town.
- 5.37 The school is constantly improving its accommodation. Recent developments include the extension of the Amey Hall complex to form the arts centre with the three-storey music and drama block. Drama has the excellent theatre and studio facilities. In art, drama and music the provision is very good and it enhances the learning and teaching. However acoustics in the theatre are not ideal for music and the space is often being used for activities. Not much artwork was on display around the school, though interesting sculptures were evident immediately outside the art school. Design and technology has very good metal workshop office and storage space, computer and classrooms on the first floor. The woodwork and metalwork facilities have been combined along with new ICT facilities in the Warehouse.

- 5.38 The layout of the chapel is simple but appropriate and the newly installed stained glass window depicting the Trinity helps to create a calm spiritual atmosphere. It is not possible for the whole school to be properly seated in the Amey Hall and so the stage and other less suitable areas are used for whole school assemblies; some boys are seated in the foyer.
- 5.39 The standard of classroom decoration is good, though some of the furnishings in the older rooms need upgrading. Some of the older classrooms are stark and lifeless whilst others show imaginative use of displays. ICT has very good facilities in two suites. Most rooms are adequate for use of ICT and audio-visual aids. Moveable furniture allows for varied teaching arrangements. Very good displays of imaginative work by pupils were seen in the classics rooms together with photographs of classics trips. Economics and business studies have good storage and office facilities; a nearby ICT room is well used for Young Enterprise. The planned upgrading of the geography department is timely: the rooms have poor wall insulation and sound proofing. The careers library comprises a neat suite of rooms that are well-maintained and fitted with computers which boys and staff find useful.
- 5.40 Most of the laboratories are of a reasonable size, airy with interesting displays of pupils' work, photographs and posters. Some laboratories are small and lack storage space; available working space is reduced by the restricted location of the main services. Science office space is cramped and the prep rooms are small in relation to the number of laboratories served.
- 5.41 Two boarding houses have been upgraded and the other is scheduled for improvement. Overall the provisions of the houses are good and the pupils comment favourably on the warm atmosphere. The study bedrooms in School House are carefully arranged to provide good storage and study and sleeping space. The day pupils' huserooms are in good decorative order with separate lockers and bag storage. The lower school common room was small; all huserooms had games facilities. Security in both School House and other parts of the school includes CCTV cameras and keypad locks. Some of the corridors in Big School and School House have uneven tiled floors.
- 5.42 Facilities on the main school site for sport and physical education are not really adequate for the school's aspirations, even though they easily meet the government's requirements. A development plan is in place to improve the situation, and awaits planning permission. The plans are to build a new sports complex which will include an all-weather pitch, new changing rooms, several additional areas for sport activities and possibly an indoor swimming pool. The sports hall, which needs upgrading, provides the only indoor PE facility, though there is an indoor shooting range. The use of the open-air swimming pool, whilst heated, is restricted to warm summer days. Facilities for outdoor sport are generally satisfactory, with on-site rugby and cricket pitches, though these vary in quality; for example, the artificial net surfaces and the small square on West Court Field are poor. Four good hard tennis courts are supplemented by two grass courts, the latter suitable for recreation but not coaching. The indoor shooting range is well used. The school boathouse is an excellent wooden framed building of architectural interest, constructed in 2003 on the site of an old boathouse with significant financial help from parents.

Does the school meet the regulatory requirements for premises and accommodation?

- 5.43 Yes.

Links with Parents and the Community

- 5.44 The quality of links with parents and the community is very good. The school ensures that parents are well informed about the progress of their sons. Parents are invited to an initial meeting with staff during the pupil's first term and further meetings with academic staff take

place each academic year. Detailed and informative reports are sent to parents, two in the Michaelmas and Lent terms and one in the Summer term. Newsletters and three headmaster's letters per term make parents aware of what is happening and bring them into the life of the school.

- 5.45 Complaints raised by parents are promptly addressed. A published procedure for complaints and appeals, in line with the requirements, is in place.
- 5.46 Over half the parents responded to the recent parental questionnaire. Almost all respondents agreed or agreed strongly that they were pleased with attainment, information, curriculum, attitudes and values and particularly with the range of extra-curricular activities.
- 5.47 Many opportunities exist for parents to become involved in the life of the school through sporting fixtures and social and cultural events such as music and drama. Parents are enrolled in "The Abingdon School Society", which organizes social gatherings and provides funding for travel scholarships. A small number of parents are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme training. Others provide assistance with careers work, interviews and work experience. In support of the quality of the rowing in the school, parents contributed significantly to the construction of a magnificent new boathouse.
- 5.48 The school is rightly proud of the many effective links which exist with the wider community. A central feature is the Amey Theatre which is used by numerous local organizations for choral events, music and drama. Creative links are enhanced by shared drama productions with SSSK girls' school and some GCSE and A level lessons are shared with them. Some Oxbridge teaching is provided for local state schools and the school is fully involved in the Oxford Independent-State School Partnership (OISSP). Boys teach some sailing to state school pupils and Latin is taught in some local primary schools by senior boys. Good contacts exist with local churches.
- 5.49 Care and concern for others are encouraged. A charities group selects, coordinates and promotes suitable charities for which large sums of money are raised through various events including an annual Kayak race from Abingdon to Westminster. The school has raised a record £30,000 for charity this year. Unique to the school is the "Moldovan Project" whereby boys travel to Moldova to assist in project work in poor areas of the country. They also organize a summer camp for orphaned Moldovan children. A great deal of good work is done by the community service group, which is responsible for visits to the sick and elderly, and a hospital day centre, helping with local after-school clubs and in charity shops. Pupils involved in the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme also assist in this work. A noteworthy feature is that all Year 9 pupils take part in this community service scheme. Ecological awareness is engendered by conservation work at various nature reserves.

Does the school meet the regulatory requirements for the provision of information?

- 5.50 Yes.

Does the school meet the regulatory requirements for the manner in which complaints are to be handled?

- 5.51 Yes.

6. PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PASTORAL CARE

Pupils' Personal Development

- 6.1 The personal development of pupils is very good. Pupils of all ages use the diverse opportunities provided to enable them to enrich their personal, social and cultural development. The school encourages pupils to consider spiritual matters and to develop a responsible and socially aware moral code. Parents express a high level of satisfaction with the opportunities for personal development afforded by the school. The school's stated aims of offering opportunities for life in the fullest sense are fulfilled through the wide range of activities.
- 6.2 The quality and diversity of experiences provided through chapel services, links with parish churches in Abingdon, the curriculum, the 'other half' activities, such as art, music, film making, and the Edmund society, offer pupils opportunities to develop awareness of a sense of the numinous. On the opening page of the religious studies web site, a hologram of religious symbols, *The Truth Is Here* focuses attention on the curriculum, which seeks to give pupils knowledge and understanding to discuss ultimate questions, enabling them to appreciate expression of belief in a multi-faith society. Societies such as the senior and junior Christian unions provide a forum for discussion and exploration of the nature of faith.
- 6.3 The comprehensive, carefully planned PHSCE programme provides information to enable exploration of physical, sexual, moral and social responsibility. Through outside speakers, the tutorial system, and the general studies carousel, this programme offers provision which at its best contributes to support pupils in building positive relationships, in taking initiative for their own learning and as responsible citizens. Through the range of opportunities within the curriculum, pupils consider, with developing understanding, moral dilemmas and issues. In economics pupils considered business ethics, and in religious studies, a range of contemporary moral issues, such as war, peace and justice. Through various pastoral channels, such as the chaplain, school counsellor, housemasters, tutors, support staff and prefects, pupils can receive guidance to help them to develop moral maturity.
- 6.4 The host of trips, excursions and exchanges all contribute to the pupils' developing understanding of their own cultural traditions and the richness and diversity of others. Within the school curriculum, pupils develop awareness of other economic, cultural and political contexts. In economics, for example, pupils from abroad gave power point presentations on the economies of their own countries. In religious studies, learning about the faith and practice of others fosters an understanding of what it means to belong to a religion, or system of thought, different from their own, and to develop respect for the beliefs of others.
- 6.5 In lessons, boarding and day houses, pupils learn to relate to one another, and to members of the teaching and support staff, in an appropriate and friendly manner. 'The other half' gives pupils a wide range of opportunities to develop social concern and awareness. In the community service activity, pupils learn a range of pastoral and social skills by assisting in local primary schools, and at after school clubs, visiting the elderly and also Abingdon Hospital. The Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and sport also provide a focus for pupils to attain appropriate self-confidence and leadership skills. Debating, music, art and drama help pupils to develop powers to communicate effectively with others.

Does the school meet the regulatory requirements for the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils?

- 6.6 Yes.

Pastoral Care, including Welfare and Health & Safety

- 6.7 Pastoral care is very good and is an important part of the school's vision for the all-round education of each pupil. Boys are well catered for through the house and tutor system. Each morning they meet with their tutor group and a wide-ranging programme of personal and social issues is available for tutor's use. Boys also have a weekly year group assembly and chapel service for spiritual and moral teaching. At sixth form level an extensive general studies programme enhances boys' learning.
- 6.8 Welfare and health and safety arrangements are very good. Almost all staff are involved as tutors or housemasters and together with the chaplain, health centre and learning support staff, they all contribute to the welfare of the boys. The appropriate policies are in place for child protection, pupil welfare and health and safety. An excellent induction programme helps new boys in Years 7 and 9 with acquaint days in school. Boarders may spend a night in a boarding house in the term before they begin.
- 6.9 The quality and variety of food served in school is very good.

Health and safety

- 6.10 Health and safety are managed and monitored to ensure compliance with the relevant regulations. Health and safety is managed by a works and health and safety committee chaired by the headmaster. Standing members of the committee include a health and safety officer, the deputy heads, the bursar and a designated governor. The committee meets approximately every three weeks. The health and safety officer is a member of the physics department and is responsible for action, as necessary, consequent on daily receipt of accident report forms. These forms are generated and transmitted electronically by the health centre staff.
- 6.11 The bursar and the health and safety officer are able to alert the health and safety committee to emerging patterns in accidents. These are brought to the attention of the health and safety committee for discussion and action, as appropriate. For example, specific action was taken to reduce the risk of early-season rugby accidents.
- 6.12 A well-qualified senior school nurse is responsible for the efficient running of the school health centre. A recent innovation has been the creation in-house of a comprehensive database on each of the pupils at the school. This allows accurate medical information about pupils to be made available, as appropriate, to health professionals and other responsible persons.
- 6.13 The school is covered by health and safety policies for the range of its activities and there is a culture of producing risk assessments, where appropriate. The bursar ensures that the policies are current and is proactive in the collection and checking of risk assessments generated by colleagues responsible either for curriculum areas or for activities.
- 6.14 Targeted health and safety monitoring is undertaken by the bursar twice each term. Line managers are required to monitor aspects of health and safety in their area of responsibility and to forward information either to the bursar or to the health and safety officer. Written approval for trips must be obtained from the second master and is only granted if the request includes a written risk assessment.
- 6.15 Health and safety training is tailored by the bursar to specific need, with a focus on key personnel. This training includes the induction of new colleagues. Initiatives include fire training and first aid certification.

Learning Support

- 6.16 Learning support, including EAL provision, is one of the strengths of the school. It is highly respected and valued by pupils and parents alike.
- 6.17 Identification procedures for both learning support and EAL are thorough and occur upon entry into the school and on subsequent occasions. Use is made of half termly reports and referrals can be initiated by pupils themselves, parents or teachers. All teachers receive an information package on learning support as part of their induction programme. Accurate identification of individual learning support needs enables any short term problems to be overcome and lifts pupils' self esteem. All pupils spoke of the value of the support given. Methods of teaching and supporting pupils are also tailored to individual needs. These seem to be effective and pupils grow in confidence to cope with subject work in main school. Evidence of the success of the EAL support is revealed in the external examination results of non-native speaking pupils.
- 6.18 Very good records give details of pupil progress. Individual educational plans (IEPs) are available for staff on the school network. The learning support coordinator regularly checks the progress of pupils in specialist support lessons and their progress in other school subjects. The quality of IEPs for pupils is very good. Targets are precisely set, strategies decided and pupil progress closely monitored. Frequent contact is made with parents whose children are on learning support. Regular reviews of the learning support system and its contribution to development planning across the school are undertaken with the director of studies.
- 6.19 Premises and accommodation are a problem for both learning support and EAL. Learning support occurs for the most part in the old coach house of Whitefield's house. For both staff and pupils, this is remote from the school. Accommodation is inadequate, ceilings and cross beams are low and some teaching takes place on a narrow landing above a steep flight of stairs. Some lessons have to occur in main school. EAL too suffers from the lack of a dedicated base.
- 6.20 Learning support and EAL teachers are well qualified and experienced. They benefit from further professional development and in turn contribute to whole school INSET. Their expertise and dedication is a real strength of the school.

Careers Education and Guidance

- 6.21 The school provides very good education and guidance to prepare boys for higher education and careers. At each stage of their education in the school they are offered appropriate help and teaching in a department which uses information technology, personal guidance and a good deal of help from outside to give boys the knowledge they need to make sensible decisions about their lives after Abingdon.
- 6.22 Since the last inspection the school has opened an impressive new careers suite for boys and both teaching and non-teaching staff. The careers master has five members of the teaching staff on his team in administering the different aspects of careers advice such as: liaison with the armed forces, gap year advice, ISCO tests, the work experience scheme and 6th form careers advice. The head of careers has a major careers guidance qualification and has also been trained to run *the Real Game* careers package. Under this leadership the school is well on the way to achieving the *CareerMark* status, which indicates the high quality of careers advice being offered and the outstanding efficiency of the team.
- 6.23 University entrance advice is very good. Boys are prepared for open days and guided in the completion of their UCAS forms.

Does the school meet the regulatory requirements for the welfare, health and safety of pupils?

6.24 Yes.

Boarding

- 6.25 Boarding makes a very positive contribution to the education at Abingdon. Recent refurbishment has significantly improved the accommodation and facilities in two of the houses, and plans are in place for the third. The houses are well-run by the housemasters, with strongly committed staff and a generous allocation of resident tutors. Each house has a matron available to the boys during the day, and the health centre is available on call at night. Boys consistently speak very highly of the benefits of boarding, the sense of community and the good relationships shown between boys of all ages. Boys generally say they are happy with the arrangements for sharing rooms. They are able to express a preference, and are encouraged to share with different members of the same year group each term. This fosters a sense of cooperation and inclusivity. The quality of rooms is variable, and some have very pleasant aspects. There are a few single rooms available for sixth form pupils.
- 6.26 New boys are given good induction, and they quickly feel at home in their environment. The head of boarding has a clear vision, setting the standards of care which are well understood. A purposeful atmosphere was evident during all the visits made by the inspecting team, and boys were courteous and relaxed in each other's company. There are good opportunities for leadership amongst the prefects, and junior boys are expected to contribute to the well-being of the house with some cleaning duties. Activities are available during the evenings, and boys are free to use the school facilities, such as the sports hall and music school. Good games' facilities within the houses are put to regular use, and some weekend activities are organised for the full boarders. There is a regular chapel service one evening a week for all boarders.
- 6.27 No Commission for Social Care Inspection team took part in the inspection but note was taken of their recent report.

7. THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Governance and Management

- 7.1 Governance and management are good; in some respects very good. The governing body is large with 20 members, sufficient to oversee a large and complex institution. The governors give considerable time to fulfil their duties and to support school activities. The board is well balanced in skills and talents, with members from the professions, academe and business. The rising age profile is likely to change. The governors have strong links with the town, with Oxford colleges and with the Mercers' Company.
- 7.2 The chairman, supported by the chairs of committees, provides clear leadership. The headmaster, second master and bursar attend governors' and committee meetings. Links between governors and staff are further strengthened by staff members on the education committee and by presentations to that committee from heads of department. The chairman also entertains the staff socially. The board is well served by the clerk, who is a local solicitor, while the bursar serves the finance and other committees, but not education. Minutes are full and accurate but clear action points would help the follow-up. Meetings are run efficiently but more time is needed for strategic thinking and debate and less for reinforcement of reports.
- 7.3 Through the education committee, governors scrutinise academic performance and this supports the high quality of achievements in the school. Governors also take a keen interest in the contribution that 'the other half' makes to the breadth of education. They meet boys at various events and, with the support of the headmaster and SMT, build good relationships throughout the school community. Clear aims, values and policies are established and the school operates happily and efficiently within this framework. Parents say the school is well managed and led and that the few problems and complaints are dealt with quickly and fairly.
- 7.4 A well thought-out development plan has been produced. Current top priority is the improvement, replacement and extension of sporting facilities at Abingdon. Strong working links have been established with Josca's, the preparatory school on the foundation. It has its own committee of governors. Josca's headmaster regularly attends SMT meetings and works closely with the headmaster of Abingdon. Increased liaison with the neighbouring girls' school, SSKS, features in discussions.
- 7.5 Strong, clear leadership and vision are provided by the headmaster. He has a good working relationship with the chairman and is well supported by his second master, the registrar and others in the SMT. The retirement of two members of SMT has led to a sensible planning of restructuring of roles.
- 7.6 The financial management is very good, under the guidance of the chairman of finance and general purposes and the administration of the bursar, who is now retiring after distinguished service to the school. Inspection by a visiting bursar confirmed the efficiency of operations. The governors are kept well informed and have clear policies on reserves and financial control. With careful management the school is generating the funds to help with future development. The management of the non-teaching staff is friendly, supportive and effective.
- 7.7 Routine administration and organisation are very efficient and help to create a good working environment. Communication is generally good and facilitated by a raft of committees which together meet the needs of the school. While human and material resources are sufficient and appropriately deployed, some departments want to move ahead more quickly with their development plans. Departmental budgets are carefully scrutinised by the bursar

and SMT. Performance is monitored by middle and senior managers through a sound appraisal scheme but execution has slipped behind schedule and more regular appraisal of senior managers is needed.

- 7.8 The management of staff by heads of department and by housemasters is good. Heads of department have a clear vision of their roles and responsibilities, both to senior staff and to their own departments. Heads of department meetings provide a valuable forum, while the academic committee operates as a smaller steering group. Communication is clear and effective. On the pastoral side, structure is more complex. Housemasters function alongside the upper, middle and lower masters but roles and responsibilities are well understood and those affected see the roles as complementary. An effective committee provides a forum for further co-ordination.

8. ACHIEVEMENT AND QUALITY IN SUBJECTS:

English

- 8.1 Pupils attain high standards at all levels in English. The department prepares pupils for GCSE English only, rather than for English and English Literature. Over the last three years, attainment in GCSE has been above the national average for maintained selective schools. The A*/A percentage has been 57%. Between twenty and thirty pupils take the subject at A Level. In the last three years, attainment has been above the national average for maintained selective schools; and in the last two years the AB% at A Level (96, 90) has been very high.
- 8.2 Attainment in lessons and written work is high, as for example the discussion of modern drama in a Year 13 revision class. Occasionally attainment in written work and lessons can be outstanding. In Years 7-9, the focus of the department is in part creative; thereafter it is critical. Several teachers encourage reading diaries in the younger years, and in some cases these contain impressive accounts of current reading. A small number of boys progress to university each year to read English, usually at highly selective universities.
- 8.3 Progress is good. Often it is rapid, as seen in the extensive sample of written work, and in the example of essays on Shakespeare and Blake by Year 13 pupils. Pupils with learning difficulties progress well for their abilities. Nationally standardised measurements indicate that progress to GCSE is in line with expectations for pupils of this ability, while at A levels it is a little above.
- 8.4 The quality of learning and behaviour is good. Sixth form pupils are immediately attentive and apply themselves purposefully. In the younger years concentration can vary. Classes enjoy good relationships with their teachers, characterised by good humour and respect. Pupils also show respect for their peers. Sometimes, teachers could enable pupils to learn from each other, by more widespread use of debate between pupils and with less teacher input. Currently, few opportunities exist for pupils to have their work published, and consideration is currently being given to this issue.
- 8.5 The quality of teaching is good. Often it is very good, with the best lessons possessing a carefully planned variety of activities, and including a diversity of stimuli, with particularly good use of video clips. Sometimes the pace of lessons is less brisk, and pupil involvement is not extensive. Greater attention is sometimes given to the critical than to the creative process. Teachers have clear and high expectations, especially with regard to the quality of written work and exam performance.
- 8.6 Assessment and recording are very good. The department possesses a policy for assessment and marking. Though this policy is adhered to with some latitude, marking is in practice a major strength of the department. Corrections are insisted on, comments are often extensive and expectations for future attainment and progress are clearly laid down in a highly supportive way, which contributes significantly to academic standards.
- 8.7 The curriculum is sound. The department does not offer English Literature GCSE, so while in the lower years the emphasis can be creative, from Year 10 onwards it is largely critical.
- 8.8 The department is well staffed. Teachers are very well qualified, and some have published critical articles and books. In lessons, they show considerable scholarly knowledge. Relations with pupils are very good.
- 8.9 Accommodation and resources are good. Lessons are taught in dedicated classrooms, which are generally light, appropriate in size, and well equipped with audio visual aids, though not

all of these are located in optimum positions. Where work is displayed, it is often of a high quality and humorous.

- 8.10 The department is well led and managed. The head of department leads by example a department in which collegiality and professional companionship are features. The teachers have substantial responsibilities outside the department and so the head of department attends to every aspect of the running of the department without delegation or assistance. INSET courses are also largely attended by the head of department. Notes, updating colleagues on important issues, are clearly written and regularly circulated and this keeps down the number of departmental meetings. The handbook is sensible. The head of department has not been appraised since appointment and enthusiasm for appraisal within the department is lacking.

Mathematics

- 8.11 Pupils' attainment overall is good in relation to their abilities. External examinations results at both A level and GCSE are above the average for maintained selective schools. Results at A level have improved each year over the last three years, with the percentage of A and B grades rising to 90% in 2004, and are now well above the level expected for these candidates. Although still above those in selective maintained schools and in line with pupils' abilities, results at GCSE were lower last year.
- 8.12 In class, Year 11 showed good recall and understanding, as in the revision lesson on simplifying algebraic expressions. Excellent attainment was seen when Year 10 top set pupils were able to calculate vector sums confidently. Pupils in a middle Year 8 class were able to rearrange equations in order to find the gradient and intercept of straight lines. Attainment, in lessons was always sound, usually good, and sometimes very good or excellent. Most written work is well presented and folders of pupils in Years 12 and 13 are particularly well organised which will make revision easier.
- 8.13 Overall progress is good, but was less than good in a minority of lessons where the lessons lacked pace and pupils were not engaged. The good progress of pupils, as they develop their mathematical skills and the ability to apply those skills in new situations, is particularly evident in their written work. In Year 7, work was seen on solving simple equations, while in Year 9 pupils are able to rearrange formulas accurately. Nationally standardised measurements over the past three years indicate that pupils are progressing as expected and recently are doing better than that, especially at A level.
- 8.14 The quality of learning and behaviour is good, and in many lessons it was very good. In almost all lessons the very good relationship with the teacher was a factor in the pupils' positive attitude towards their work. In a Year 7 lesson a very good discussion between pupils considered how to calculate the value of y for a given value of x in an equation. In Year 12 and Year 13 lessons, pupils worked independently on revision exercises and were able to ask for assistance when necessary. They talk knowledgeably about their work.
- 8.15 The quality of teaching was good or very good in almost half the lessons and sound in the remainder. In some lessons it was less than sound because of poor classroom control or because the lesson was teacher-dominated with little opportunity for pupil involvement. Most lessons began with clear aims and a recapitulation of the work covered in the previous lesson. The best teaching engaged pupils and contained a variety of activities, including practical demonstrations, as seen in a mechanics lesson on circular motion, use of a video to illustrate vectors and use of the interactive whiteboard to illustrate gradients of straight line graphs. Some teachers made good use of praise. In many of the revision lessons teachers gave pupils excellent advice on answering examination questions. However, in many lessons the teacher worked through examples on the board for the pupils to copy before they worked

through an exercise, rather than allowing pupils to be actively involved in the process of revision.

- 8.16 Assessment and recording are sound. A wide variation exists in the quality of marking seen in pupils' work, and in many cases the departmental guidelines were not followed. In the main all preps had been marked with good comments, but less consistency was seen in the marking of classwork. In the best books, pupils had been given a sheet clearly stating the criteria for marking and an explanation of the grades awarded. In one Year 13 folder, some work had been marked with a grade, some with a percentage and the rest with a number, and all without explanation.
- 8.17 The curriculum is good. The flexible and effective allocation and distribution of lessons in Years 12 and 13 lessons allows time for tests but also gives the single lessons which the department prefers.
- 8.18 All teachers are well qualified and have secure subject knowledge. The head of department observes members of the department teaching but little peer observation occurs. Much of the recent in-service training has been exam focussed, and not related to teaching and learning styles.
- 8.19 The departmental accommodation is very good, occupying a suite of rooms which are well equipped in terms of ICT and books and equipment. Although the schemes of work have identified appropriate use of ICT, further development is needed. Some, but not all, rooms have displays of pupils' work, including a painting with mathematical features highlighted, which offers spiritual and cultural links.
- 8.20 Leadership and management are good. In this large department, and in the absence of a second in the department, many tasks are delegated to willing colleagues.
- 8.21 Pupils are entered for national mathematics competitions with considerable success. Boys in Years 12 and 13 take part in events arranged for local schools, and attend relevant lectures. A small number of boys enjoy the lower school mathematics club.

Science

- 8.22 In Years 7 and 8 pupils take a physical science course aimed at developing general scientific skills. A separate course, introductory to later biological studies, is run by that department. Management of the double award science programme has been the responsibility of the three science departments.
- 8.23 Attainment in physical science is high for pupils of this age range and ability. This is commendable given the diversity of experience in science of pupils entering the school. Progress in understanding physical science and in practical skills development is good. Sometimes it is rapid.
- 8.24 Learning in physical science is good. Sometimes it is very good as for example, in the work on series and parallel circuits carried out by Year 7. This produced very good learning in one of the practical classes observed and was said by the pupils to be great fun, but with purpose.
- 8.25 Teaching is good. Sometimes it is very good and well-chosen activities enable enthusiastic staff to deliver an exciting course, and to transmit their enthusiasm to the pupils.
- 8.26 Management of the course by the science co-ordinator is good. He is ably supported by a dedicated technician. Both play an important part in the success of the course. Marking of pupils' books is very good with constructive comments.

- 8.27 At the end of Year 9, pupils are required to choose between the three separate sciences or co-ordinated double award science to GCSE level. Until recently, small numbers have opted to take double award and it has been possible to cater for them in a single teaching set. In the past year this number has begun to increase and this has enabled setting to occur. Pupils taking double award are able to take a broader range of GCSE subjects without excluding them from further science studies to AS or A2 level.
- 8.28 Attainment at GCSE double science over the three years from 2002 to 2004 has been in line with the national average for maintained selective schools. Pupil attainment is good and the setting arrangements enable work to be targeted appropriately at the ability of the pupils. Progress and learning are both good and the pupils are well motivated. The quality of teaching is good. For example, an opportunity to work systematically through some of the more difficult ideas associated with empirical formula calculation ensured that most pupils were successful in the activity.

Biology

- 8.29 Attainment is good for pupils of this age and ability. Attainment in examinations at GCSE is good. For grades A* to C, results are above those for maintained selective schools. Results at A level are good. At A and B grades have been above those for maintained selective schools in the last three years. Attainment in class and in workbooks is very good in the higher sets, and good in the middle and lower sets for all years. Those who are less than fully fluent in English achieve results comparable with the rest of their cohort.
- 8.30 Progress in lessons is very good in all years except 9 and 10 where it is good. Pupils in Year 7 are able to tease out the interrelationships between predators and prey in ecosystems exceeding the carrying capacity. The progress of a dyslexic pupil in Year 12 benefited from good assistance in the organisation of his material, following discussion with the head of learning support. Year 13 pupils demonstrated very good data interpretative skills using genetic data. Numerical and graphical skills are at least good and sometimes very good. Nationally standardised measurements indicate that progress to GCSE is mostly in line with expectations for pupils of this ability but in 2002 and 2004 it was below expectations for some pupils. At A level, while some progress less well than expected, most are in line.
- 8.31 Quality of learning, attitudes and behaviour is very good in Years 8 to 10 and in 12 and 13; it is good in Year 7 and Year 11. Pupils are well-motivated, interested learners and cooperative in their relationships with both teachers and peers. The pupils approach experimental work thoughtfully and demonstrated a willingness to apply knowledge to new situations, for example a Year 12 set deduced that immobilising an enzyme inside beads increased the time the enzyme and substrate were in contact, thus speeding up the rate of hydrolysis. When teaching is good, pupils respond with commitment, interest and enthusiasm. When the expectations were unclear, the behaviour of some pupils was unsatisfactory resulting in a loss of focus and respect for each other and the teacher.
- 8.32 The quality of teaching is good overall. In a very small proportion it was sound or less and as a result not all pupils made sufficient progress. Most lessons show good use of time and resources, and include a range of activities designed to consolidate and extend the pupil's understanding, develop practical dexterity and foster experimental testing. Effective use is made of class discussions, experimental data, worksheets, examination papers, video and experimentation. ICT was used occasionally in displaying data. Homework assists understanding as well as introducing pupils to the possible applications of new knowledge. For example, a Year 12 class discussed nucleic acid biochemistry and its role in gene expression and how methods exist to sequence, replicate and even synthesise DNA, opening new possibilities for combating disease and designing transgenic organisms.

- 8.33 Assessment, reporting and recording are good. Coursework is cross-moderated and homework is marked to a very good standard, in line with the school's marking policy, and in most cases includes detailed constructive criticism. Assessment comprises end of unit tests, end of year and mock examinations. Work that is deemed below standard is redone. All marks are carefully recorded in the teacher's mark books. The curriculum is good and the department contributes to lower school science. It produces clear schemes of work for each year.
- 8.34 Staffing is good. The department benefits from the knowledge and experience of six full-time and one part-time biologist with very extensive experience of GCSE and A level teaching and an infectious enthusiasm for their subject. A well-qualified and experienced technician ably supports the teaching staff. Appraisal of teachers is formal and involves lesson observations, followed by a report from the head of department to the headmaster with follow-ups if necessary.
- 8.35 Resources are good. The department is well equipped with apparatus for sophisticated experimentation, four lap tops, TV, videos, some ceiling mounted projectors for power point, books, aquaria and a greenhouse containing a range of tropical and temperate plants. Accommodation is good with light and airy laboratories. Most have mains services located on both side and middle benches allowing flexibility in practical work, but one, smaller laboratory has only mains services around the outside benches restricting its practical use. However, the office and storage areas are very restricted and the prep room is too small for its role and too distant from some of the laboratories it serves.
- 8.36 Management is good and the department is led with enthusiasm by a highly qualified and experienced biologist. A wide range of enrichment activities is organised. Biology field courses are held both in the UK and abroad.

Chemistry

- 8.37 Pupils achieve very good standards in relation to their ability at all levels in chemistry. Over the three years from 2002 to 2004, attainment in GCSE has been above the national average for maintained selective schools rising to 81% A*/A grades. Over the same period, attainment in A-level has been above the national average for maintained selective schools with 81% AB grades in 2004.
- 8.38 Attainment is good in Years 9 to 11. The setting arrangements enable work to be targeted at the ability of the pupils.
- 8.39 Progress in Years 9 to 11 is good and sometimes rapid. A relatively demanding activity, involving the determination of a chemical formula by a gravimetric method, promoted greater understanding of the chemical bonding present in the crystals. Progress in Years 12 and 13 is good and often rapid. For example, the study of a number of equilibrium reactions was linked back by Year 12 students to earlier work in which the same chemistry had been used in a different context. Nationally standardised measurements indicate that progress to both GCSE and A level is very good.
- 8.40 Learning is good in Years 9 to 11 and a co-operative team spirit is evident in practical work. In a crowded laboratory, a Year 11 set carried out a diverse range of experiments, which would have been difficult to tackle safely without a willingness to work together. Learning is very good in Years 12 and 13 with clear evidence of independent learning through practical work.

- 8.41 Teaching is good at all levels. It is sometimes excellent. Both younger staff and those with more experience bring distinctive abilities to lessons. They demonstrate a combination of scholarship and innovation in the teaching process. A very good Year 11 class benefited from a varied delivery, including a practical demonstration, a short pupil practical and a video clip, all accompanied by a demanding but supportive round of questions and answers which engaged every pupil.
- 8.42 Marking of pupil work is generally effective, even though it is not uniform across the department. The department has the excellent technical support necessary for the high level of practical work achieved. Departmental resources are good and the accommodation is adequate, but the laboratories are crowded and the arrangement of teaching and preparation rooms is complex. Each half of the chemistry floor is serviced, almost entirely, by its own technician, from their own prep room. Some storage of resources and chemicals is at a height which is potentially unsafe. Below the sixth form, no protective aprons are available in the department, but eye protection is practised universally.
- 8.43 Management and leadership by the acting head of department are good. Participation in a wide range of events has been encouraged and this extends the subject for pupils and brings credit to the department and school. Pupils achieve very good levels of success in the RSC chemistry Olympiad. Schemes of work are clear and appropriate to the abilities in different sets. Appraisal has been on-going even during the head of department interregnum.

Physics

- 8.44 Attainment is very good in relation to the abilities of the pupils. Attainment in GCSE physics is good and above the standards in maintained selective schools, with some two thirds achieving A or A* grades in 2004. Attainment in public examinations as a whole is good and above the average for all maintained selective schools. At A-level attainment is very good compared with maintained selective schools, with most boys achieving A and B grades during the last three years.
- 8.45 Attainment across the ability range in individual classes observed and written work inspected was typically good in Key Stage 4. It was sometimes very good or excellent, especially in Year 12. Practical skills, including work on graphs, are generally very good indeed. Examples of the practical coursework seen, especially that done in Years 11 to 13, were of a high standard. One genuinely outstanding sixth form project and a number of other excellent projects on display in the laboratories were scrutinised. Approximately half of the pupils taking A-level physics go on to study physics, engineering or physics-related courses at university.
- 8.46 Progress is good. In the classes observed, it was typically good or very good and in the written work inspected it was good. Two sixth form classes observed were especially good in facilitating rapid progress. In a small number of cases, progress was less than appropriate for the ages and abilities of the pupils. Nationally standardised measurements indicate that progress to GCSE is in line with expectations and to A-level is significantly above expectations.
- 8.47 Learning is good. Most pupils are responsive to the teaching and to the challenges, especially in Years 12 and 13. Pupils work co-operatively on paired and group tasks. Pupils work safely as a matter of routine. Occasionally, pupils were insufficiently involved in the lesson. In two lessons observed, some boys appeared to be distracted and inattentive for much of the time. The Advancing Physics programme, at AS and A2 levels, has had a positive effect on motivation, with many pupils expressing a keen interest especially in

project work. Although no use of ICT by pupils was observed, many very good examples of such work were seen in the written work scrutinised.

- 8.48 Teaching is good. In several classes the teaching observed was either very good or excellent, encouraging active learning. In the small number of lessons where the teaching was sound or less than sound, either the pace was too slow or a lack of clarity inhibited appropriate progress and good learning. Even so, in most of the classes observed, teachers demonstrated a confident grasp of the subject and communicated a quiet passion for physics to the pupils. Lessons are usually well planned and organised. Teachers are attuned to the needs of those with learning difficulties and of the different learning styles of individual pupils. Discipline is generally firm but friendly. Appropriate and effective use is made of ICT.
- 8.49 Assessment, recording and reporting are very good. The departmental marking policy is usually consistently applied. Records of marks are kept in very good order. Some teachers use positive marking and assessment to raise performance, but opportunities are not always taken to acknowledge effort, progress and perseverance as well as attainment.
- 8.50 The physics curriculum is good and efficiently planned. In addition, electronics is offered within the general studies optional programme.
- 8.51 Resources for learning are very good. Practical lessons and teacher demonstrations benefit from the wide range of well-maintained apparatus, enabling the department to emphasise the importance of experimental work to pupils. The provision for ICT is also very good with computers and projectors available in all laboratories. The department consists of five full-time and very well qualified staff, expertly supported by a full-time technician.
- 8.52 The accommodation is sound with four laboratories. Two are of a good size but one laboratory, used exclusively for sixth form projects when this work is in progress, is less spacious and used only for sixth form and small class work. The very well organised prep room is compact, with some apparatus stored on high shelves. A staff workroom provides an invaluable resource for teachers. Very good support is provided by cleaning staff, helping to maintain an ordered, tidy and safe environment.
- 8.53 The management of the department is very good and the leadership is sympathetic and effective, helping to promote a strong team spirit. The department meets formally and regularly, and informal communications help to maximise its effectiveness. Professional development and training are given appropriate and sustained attention, supported by appraisal. Liaison with the other two heads of science subjects and the science co-ordinator is reasonably regular. Links with the learning support staff are good and help the department to support pupils with special needs.
- 8.54 The department promotes an awareness of the importance of physics within and beyond the school community, participating effectively in the organisation of National Science Week activities for pupils from many local schools and through special activities such as the early morning observation by staff and pupils of the transit of Venus across the face of the sun.

Art and Design

- 8.55 Pupils achieve good standards in Years 7 to 11, and very good standards in Years 12 and 13. Attainment in GCSE is good in relation to pupils' abilities and very good at A level. GCSE performance over the last three years has been in line with the national average for all maintained selective schools and well above in relation to A* and A grades. AS results in 2004 were outstanding with all 10 candidates achieving A grades.

- 8.56 Pupils' attainment in class is good in Years 7 to 11, and very good in Years 12 and 13. For example a Year 7 lesson involving the formal evaluation of compositional elements demonstrated their ability to understand space and colour. Workbooks at GCSE are informative and show good command of collage, montage and experimental techniques in graphic design. Painting and 3D work in Years 12 and 13 is very good and some is excellent. Contextual reference is incorporated in rich painting deriving from the work of diverse 20th century artists.
- 8.57 Pupils make rapid progress at all stages. In a Year 9 lesson on still life, progress was made in one lesson in the production of beautifully controlled graphite drawings. Progress over time was seen in junior sketchbooks which demonstrated observed and imaginative drawing skills. Pupils with learning support progressed at comparable levels. Nationally standardized measurements indicate that progress to AS and A2 has been consistently above national norms over the last three years. However, progress to GCSE has been a little below expectations for pupils of this ability in two of the last three years.
- 8.58 The quality of learning is very good at all levels. Pupils are happy and well-motivated. Much use is made of information technology to enable independent learning. This was seen in the work of a Year 13 pupil which reflected much original research and used personal drawings skilfully combined with illustrative information from the internet. Behaviour is almost always exemplary and good relations exist between pupils and staff. Pupils respect their own work and are supportive of that of others.
- 8.59 The quality of teaching is very good. It is never less than good and sometimes excellent. Work is well prepared and elicits the optimum response from pupils. Staff offer support and encouragement to pupils at every level and after school activities reflect the wider interest of pupils.
- 8.60 A broad and balanced curriculum supported the teaching of the subject. Time constraints create some difficulty, limiting the volume of lower school work, but not its quality. However, some lessons produced excellent responses. Staff are well qualified and well deployed. Resources are very good as is the accommodation. Further enrichment occurs in good quality after school activities.
- 8.61 Assessment and recording are sound, though not adequately standardised by the head of department. Otherwise, management is effective, and administration is carried out with a high level of competence. The operation of the department is smooth and the dissemination of information is efficient. Leadership is effective in ensuring the cohesion of personnel within the department. The process of appraisal has been consistently implemented and outcomes have been positive. Teachers have been helped by the targets set. Professional development, including INSET, has enhanced skills. Departmental development is on-going and benefits from regular meetings. The departmental handbook is comprehensive and contains imaginative schemes of work.

Classics

- 8.62 Attainment is very good. Examination results at all levels are good in relation to the abilities of the pupils and above those achieved in selective maintained schools. The percentage of A* and A grades achieved in the last three years has been significantly above the average for maintained selective schools. Over the last three years, at A level no boy has failed to gain an A grade in Greek. Last year all but three of the 18 A level candidates in classical subjects were awarded A or B grades. Boys were successful in advanced extension award in Latin.

- 8.63 Attainment in lessons and written work is very good, well beyond that expected of pupils of that age, and the best was quite excellent. Some written work in ancient history was of undergraduate standard. A level students discussed the agōn in Euripidēs' *Hippolytus* with reference to ancient sources, while intelligent middle school boys ably explained the logistics of Nero's failed attempt to kill his mother.
- 8.64 Progress was very good in almost all lessons and struck the right balance between speed and thoroughness. Time was well used and pupils moved at a healthy pace without leaving anyone behind. Lower school boys quickly grasped the principles of the subjunctive used in temporal clauses and could apply them at once, while A level ancient history students made short and intelligent work of a long and complex poem by Horace. Boys who had already taken Latin GCSE in Year 10 were progressing well with the demands of a full GCSE in classical civilisation in a single year. Nationally standardized measurements indicate that progress to A level in classical subjects has been consistently above those for similar schools over the last three years. Value-added data over the period up to GCSE indicates that outcomes are broadly similar to that for pupils of similar ability in comparable schools.
- 8.65 Learning in class is good. Highly motivated learners at all levels of the school are pushing themselves and asking incisive questions, engaging in a fruitful and lively dialogue with the teacher and each other about the nuances of translation from Latin and Greek or the significance of the elements of Greek religious festivals. However, other boys were content to let others do the talking and were passive recipients of the lesson. Pupils receiving learning support were not disadvantaged in any of the lessons or the work observed.
- 8.66 Teaching was very good. The best lessons were excellent. All the teachers observed were expert, specialised, authoritative and devoted to the needs of the individual pupils. The pleasant rapport between teacher and pupil was almost always conducive to swift and enjoyable learning and free discussion of ideas. At best, teaching aimed to elicit a personal response from the pupils and engaged in a common pursuit of knowledge rather than providing force-fed answers. Teaching methods are imaginative and include pair work and the able use of ICT.
- 8.67 Assessment in class and in written work is very good. Some of the best marking was excellent. Examples were seen of very full and helpful comments on written work, addressed to the individual pupil by name and explaining sensible targets for future progress. The department has a marking and assessment policy in the departmental handbook, which is consistently used.
- 8.68 Classics has a secure place in the overall school curriculum and attracts good numbers opting for these subjects. All boys study Latin in the lower school but thereafter may opt not to take it or else to choose classical civilisation. They may also opt to study Greek. Extra classes are provided for boys whose needs do not fit into the normal timetable. In the sixth form pupils may choose any or all of Latin, Greek and ancient history.
- 8.69 Staffing in this department is adequate; but the head of department is teaching significantly more periods per week than is normal. The newly qualified member of the department (NQT) is on a suitably light timetable this year. All teachers are suitably qualified, attend relevant in-service training sessions and study days, and continue to advance their own knowledge of the subject through reading, research and writing.
- 8.70 Resources are very good. A full range of excellent text books, audio-visual aids and access to computers and the internet are well used. Teachers use their own laptop computers to good effect. One classroom is equipped with an excellent array of data-projector, video, DVD, stereo sound system and drop-down projection screen. The department has an

admirable study site on the school intranet, containing materials and links to many aspects of the curriculum and the ancient world in general. The head of department liaises closely with the school librarian to improve the stock of classics books.

- 8.71 Accommodation is very good, in a pleasant and comfortable suite of large and airy classrooms on one floor. The five members of the department share four classrooms and an office. Constant communication between members of the department is fostered by their proximity.
- 8.72 The management and leadership of this harmonious unit of like-minded and co-operative department are excellent. Departmental meetings happen regularly and are fully minuted. Led by a scholar of some distinction on the national classical scene, respect and goodwill of pupils and colleagues are strong features of the department. The appraisal system is in place but one teacher has yet to be appraised. The departmental handbook is clear and thorough, and promotes consistency of approach.
- 8.73 Very good enrichment stems from the range of trips which are provided, for instance – to Roman sites in this country, to Italy, Greece, Turkey, Crete and Libya. Local classical reading competitions, a junior classics club, excellent speakers from universities and the group of boys teaching Latin in a local primary school all enrich the subjects.

Design & Technology

- 8.74 Pupils achieve good standards in Design Technology. Pupils' attainment in national tests is satisfactory in relation to their abilities. Pupils' attainment in GCSE and at A level is very good in relation to their abilities. Results at both levels have been in line with the national averages for all maintained selective schools over the last three years. Two thirds of GCSE grades gained were A*/A and a third of candidates gained A or B grades at A level.
- 8.75 Pupils' attainment in lessons is good at all stages. Junior pupils achieve well through short but carefully constructed projects, which familiarize pupils with techniques in design and skills in making. A Year 7 project, based on the designing and making of a bird feeder, demonstrated understanding of design, choice of materials and the application of construction skills. Problem solving is effective. A Year 12 group showed good understanding of capital and income in a lesson on energy sources. Good drawing skills were evident in a lesson on mechanical advantage in Year 11. The presentation of GCSE and A level folders of work is of a good and sometimes very good standard. Competent use is made of drawing programmes and digital photography to explain processes.
- 8.76 Pupils' progress in DT is good at all ages. Pupils with learning support and those with English as a second language progress comparably. The pressure to work and learn at lower school level at a rapid pace was demonstrated in a Year 8 exercise in the making of a trowel from sheet steel. Skills of measuring, marking, cutting and shaping were developed quickly. Good progress over time was illustrated in the work of Year 12 pupils, working on a pneumatically powered clamp to hold circuit boards.
- 8.77 The quality of learning and behaviour is very good. Pupils move about the department in a purposeful way and are aware of the necessity of careful attention to health and safety rules, which are strictly observed.
- 8.78 The quality of teaching is good and sometimes very good. Lessons are carefully planned and the curriculum is designed to maximize the time available. Teachers monitor pupils at all stages of lessons. Assessment, reporting and recording are good. The curriculum provision is sound. Staff are appropriately qualified and deployed. The workshops are available

beyond lesson time for extension work and are manned by a dedicated teaching staff and technicians.

- 8.79 Accommodation is good. The physical consolidation of the department has done much to lift morale and the creative design of the upper floor has enhanced the facility. The lower metalwork area compares rather unfavourably and needs refurbishment. Equipment and resources are good.
- 8.80 Management and leadership are very good. Management is firm but fair and sensitivity is blended with resolve to raise standards in the department. Identification of inherent weaknesses and the resolution of problems are top priorities and clear leadership is shown in the vigorous way these priorities are executed. A process of appraisal is firmly established and has proved helpful in identifying targets. Targets are regularly reviewed and this helps to improve professional development, which includes appropriate professional courses as well as those which are examination related. Administration is routinely of a high order.

Economics and Business Studies

- 8.81 Students achieve good standards in economics in relation to their abilities. Pupils' attainment by Year 13 is very good. Results in A level examinations in the past three years were, except in 2002, well above the national average for maintained selective schools, based on percentages of A and B grades. In the last two years at A Level, four in every five candidates gained an A or B grade. In business studies pupils achieve good standards. Results in A level examinations in 2002 and 2003 were above the national average for maintained selective schools but below in 2004.
- 8.82 In both economics and business studies attainment in class in Years 12 and 13 is good in relation to pupils' abilities. During the revision lessons observed, pupils were able to recall key terms and concepts and in some classes pupils had the opportunity to show some of their analytical skills. Evidence of good attainment was observed in a Year 13 lesson on types of unemployment and the relative importance of each, and in another lesson on making ethical business decisions. Attainment seen in workbooks is very good.
- 8.83 The progress of pupils in class in both subjects is good. Very good progress is evident in pupils' folders, where they complete teacher-generated interactive handouts and develop their own analysis and evaluation. Students needing learning support are keeping up with the rest of the class.
- 8.84 The quality of learning in class in both subjects is good. Pupils are well motivated and maintain a clear focus on the material and questions given out in each lesson. Their competence as learners in lessons was shown in their ready response to questions asked of them, although most of the revision tasks observed did not encourage the development of answers in depth or discussion by the class. The large number of competitions entered, the visits to the industrial and commercial world and the study tour taken to Europe each year enriches all pupils' experience of the subject. Special visits are arranged for the most able pupils, such as the series of lectures at the Adam Smith Institute in London. Visiting speakers to the Economics Society also provide a focus for pupil interest and involvement in the subject.
- 8.85 The quality of teaching is good. Both members of the department share the teaching of both subjects. Teacher-prepared and photocopied notes provide a structure to the lessons and the interactive nature of most of the notes ensures good pupil focus and participation. Pupils from overseas appreciate the prepared notes, particularly in their first year at the school when their skills in the language are still developing. Lessons are strongly teacher-led, which

limits the participation of the pupils. The use of ICT, currently being developed as a teaching tool, will bring greater variety of approach.

- 8.86 Assessment is good and many of the comments on marked work are positive and effective in developing pupil skills. Accommodation and resources are good. The department is well resourced and the classrooms and corridors are enlivened by displays of visits, the study tour and the outcomes of competitions. The department has access to an ICT room and one classroom has a ceiling projector. The economics and business section of the library is small and some interesting up-to-date books have not been well used.
- 8.87 The leadership and management of the department are good. The two subjects are managed by one head of department. While regular weekly department meetings are held to discuss issues, no department appraisal has been carried out, though instances of mutual lesson observation have been recorded.

General Studies

- 8.88 The programme of general studies is extensive: with 32 different courses it was possible to see only a small proportion of lessons yet some conclusions emerged. The courses are almost all for boys in Year 12. Attendance at lessons is good though some boys have to miss lessons for other commitments.
- 8.89 Attainment is very good. All but the languages and computer courses are non-examined. Little or no written work is required. Attainment is evident in class discussions and much of this is at a high level. Boys are able to respond to questions which are intellectually challenging as in a Philosophy class discussing Occam's razor. Others ask penetrating questions or make original contributions to the discussion. Some of the less able struggle to keep up but are more involved in other courses of a more practical nature.
- 8.90 Progress is good. In some courses like Spanish, which leads to GCSE in one year, progress is very good, though those who find the pace in learning a new language too much do not have to take the exam. Progress was variable in the one year design project - some groups were doing much better than others in building a go-kart. In the courses carousel, boys change after every four lessons so they have to absorb material very quickly. Progress is rapid when they read around the topic as in *The World's Trouble Spots*. Most lessons proceed at a good pace.
- 8.91 Learning is good. While some courses are compulsory and some are chosen, most students show keenness to learn in all lessons. The best learning occurs when they take an active part in the lesson; sometimes they are not given enough opportunity. They are not disconcerted by the sensitive nature of the discussion, as in *Sexual Ethics*. Boys' attitudes and behaviour are very good; they are cooperative and relate well to their teachers. A few boys are passive and some are left behind by the high pace and intellectual challenge of the lessons.
- 8.92 Teaching is very good. Most teachers volunteer to teach the courses and are very enthusiastic. Their subject knowledge is very strong and some let their enthusiasm run away with them and do not allow enough contribution from the boys. The quality of discussion provoked by the teachers is high. Except in languages and computers, little assessment or marking occurs.
- 8.93 The contribution made by general studies to the balance of the curriculum is excellent. While the actual range of courses on offer depends on the willingness of teachers to contribute, in practice the curriculum coverage is very good. Some boys are enabled to continue with interests developed earlier, as in music, design and art; others are able to

develop new skills as in modern languages. The courses provide well for pupils across the ability range and make a considerable contribution to pupils' personal development and to the PSHCE programme. No attempt is made to use general studies to ensure balance in the individual AS programme for boys. With a few exceptions, this very good programme of general studies is not available in Year 13.

- 8.94 With so many members of staff contributing, staffing is very good and this enables many of the sets to be small. Other resources are also very good. Most teachers draw on the specialist provision of their departments, but good examples of the use of audio visual equipment were seen. All the teaching rooms provide a pleasant environment and most have wall displays which provide appropriate stimulus, not least the maps in the room used for *Trouble Spots*.
- 8.95 The management and leadership of general studies are very good. With no handbook, central control is minimal. A successful series of sixth form lectures supplements the programme.

Geography

- 8.96 Pupils achieve high standards throughout the school. Attainment at GCSE is high in relation to their abilities and well above the national average for all maintained selective schools. In 2004, 83% achieved A* or A grades. At A level over the last three years, results have been consistently well above the national average for all maintained selective schools with over 90% of all grades at A or B grades. The results of boys on learning support have been very good.
- 8.97 In work observed in class, attainment for all ages and abilities is invariably good and often high. For example, a Year 7 class displayed high order analysis of the distribution pattern of football league teams. The scrutiny of pupils' written work shows good and high level attainment in all year groups, in particular, impressive pieces of Year 8 research work on Brazil. Very high attainment for some pupils was seen in Year 9 where pupils were encouraged to enter for the Geographical Association (GA) Young Geographer of the Year national competition. One pupil came second and several others were highly commended, a considerable achievement for a single school. Some Year 11 pupils entered as a team in the GA World Wise quiz competition won the Oxfordshire regional round. Pupils receiving learning support achieve well in their written work.
- 8.98 Progress in all year groups is good and sometimes rapid both in lessons and in the scrutiny of pupils' work. This was seen in the responses to teacher questions and unprompted questions from pupils, teacher interventions and effective pair work, as in one Year 12 revision lesson recalling and developing photograph analytical skills. Comparable progress was made by the pupils on learning support. Through effective use of the interactive whiteboard, rapid progress was also made in a Year 9 lesson on meander migration and floodplain development. The Year 11 and 13 coursework reports are very high quality and a strength of the department; they indicate the progress made over time. Nationally standardised measurements show that progress to both GCSE and A levels has improved markedly over the last three years and is now very good.
- 8.99 The quality of learning, attitudes and behaviour is good, sometimes very good. Most pupils are competent learners, responding well to questions and sometimes able to make links to earlier learning, for example in a Year 13 lesson on avalanche hazards. In one Year 7 lesson pupils were keen, volunteered contributions on their own initiative, co-operated well in pairs and displayed sustained concentration. In most lessons, pupils enjoy good relationships with teachers, are well motivated and respond well to tasks, whether working individually or in pairs. Quality of learning was also evident in written work, particularly where opportunities

were given for independent learning, as in coursework on population issues and on Brazil. In these and in other ways, pupils were acquiring ICT skills.

- 8.100 The quality of teaching is good and sometimes very good. All teachers show very good subject knowledge and understanding of course requirements. In most cases, lesson objectives are made clear to pupils, giving a sense of purpose. Lessons are well organised and finish on time. Prep is appropriately set. Good use is made of resources, including the interactive whiteboard. Class control is effective; achieved through calm purposeful lesson starters, enthusiasm for the subject and the use of humour. Most lesson plans identified those pupils receiving learning support and appropriate information was included in mark books. Pupils of all abilities are well supported by varying the types of question asked, and by encouragement during the activity phases of lessons. High expectations for pupils of all abilities were made clear for classwork, coursework and prep.
- 8.101 Resources are good. The accommodation for the department has some limitations but is among the priorities in the current school development plan. The school librarian gives support in the development of pupils' research skills. The five full time teaching staff are graduates and have teaching qualifications. Appraisal reviews by the head of department are thorough, well documented and include formal lesson observation though the head of department himself is still waiting to be appraised. Professional development for teachers is clearly linked to the development plan.
- 8.102 Leadership and management are very good. Leadership is strong, clear and respected. Management is conscientious and hard working and administration is efficient. Departmental meetings are well structured and minuted. Informal consultation occurs regularly. Aspects of the school development plan 2004-9 which relate to the department have already been acted upon. The aims and objectives of the departmental development plan are clearly thought out and annually reviewed but only limited consideration is given to strategies, times and costs. Year 9 pupils were recently very successful in the young geographer of the year competition.

History

- 8.103 Pupils achieve good results at all levels of the school. At GCSE, attainment has been above the national average for boys in maintained selective schools over the past three years. In 2004 70% of GCSE grades were at A and A*. A level results have been significantly above the national average in maintained selective schools over the past three years. Two thirds obtained either A or B grades, results generally above expectations for these pupils.
- 8.104 In lessons, pupils' attainment is good. Year 9 boys drew on impressive factual knowledge in explaining the significance of the Zimmerman Telegram, while their analysis of a photograph of Passchendaele skilfully interpreted the source material. A Year 8 group linked the emergence of Protestantism to the development of printing, while a Year 13 discussion on the historiography of Bismarck's Germany showed high level sophistication. The standard of written work is consistently very good. Sixth form essays draw on an impressive variety of texts, and even the writing of boys in Years 7 and 8 is well developed. ICT was used with some classes and a start made on the productive use of the department's study site.
- 8.105 Progress in lessons is good and in some cases rapid. Written work shows good progress at all levels. By the end of Year 13, students have developed strong analytical skills.
- 8.106 Pupils' learning and behaviour are good. Some energetic examples of group work were seen and at all levels the response to teachers' questions was lively and constructive. A cooperative attitude prevails in lessons. A Year 9 group responded well to a research task on

the Nivelle Offensive and used books effectively and independently to develop knowledge and understanding of the First World War.

- 8.107 The quality of teaching is good at all stages and many very good lessons were observed. No lesson was unsatisfactory. The teachers have very good subject knowledge and, on occasions, a high level of scholarship was witnessed, in particular in a revision class on nineteenth century Germany. Marking is thorough and reflects the departmental marking policy. Comments on some sixth form essays were both highly detailed and constructive.
- 8.108 The curriculum is well thought out and provides range, variety and depth. Options are available in Years 12 and 13, but choice is often determined by timetabling constraints rather than personal preference. The department provides a variety of enrichment activities. The senior history society is able to capitalise on the school's location and attracts some very distinguished visiting speakers, while members of the junior society proudly displayed the collection of mediaeval helmets made in their meetings. The department runs a regular programme of trips and visits, both in the United Kingdom and overseas. Future trips will be more closely integrated into the department's programmes of study.
- 8.109 The department is well resourced with an excellent stock of books at all levels. Sixth form students, in particular, have access to a most impressive range and variety of texts. One classroom is equipped with an electronic whiteboard and the department is close to other ICT facilities. All the classrooms are in good condition and their appearance is enhanced by attractive displays, both in the classrooms and in the corridor. The departmental office provides a busy and active focal point for its activities.
- 8.110 The quality of leadership and management in the department is very good. Regular departmental meetings are held and formally minuted. The departmental handbook is both comprehensive and useful with thorough statements of policy, both for the gifted and talented, and for those with specific learning difficulties. Detailed procedures have been developed for the induction of new members of staff. Appraisal is conducted thoroughly, while professional development has concentrated on the academic side and on developing ICT skills. The head of department has taken a lead in encouraging lesson observation and has a clear vision for the future of the department.

Modern Foreign Languages

- 8.111 In modern foreign languages attainment is very good in relation to the ability of the pupils. From 2002-2004, pupils' results at GCSE and in particular in German were well above selective maintained schools. In French and German more than two thirds of pupils gained A* or A, and in Russian more than half gained A*/A. At A level from 2002-2004 more than two thirds of pupils gained A or B grades and all pupils gained A to C in French, German and Russian.
- 8.112 In lessons observed in lower school, pupils participated successfully in Year 7 French, learning vocabulary for descriptions and in Year 10 French pupils successfully learnt to use reflexive verbs in the past tense in describing daily routine. Examples of good levels of attainment leading to very good examination results are many. Attainment in written work is also very good.
- 8.113 Progress in lessons is good and sometimes very good. Challenging work was observed in A level German where boys, discussed the developing world confidently and knowledgeably in German. In A2 French similar levels of progress were observed, where newly acquired vocabulary and knowledge of grammatical structure allowed boys to express their ideas

- confidently on environmental issues. In Year 13 ability to listen to and understand authentic French, on issues in France, demonstrated the good progress that had been made at AS level.
- 8.114 The quality of learning is good and pupils' willingness to listen to each other and to work in pairs allows good target language practice and acquisition of new language. Year 11 pupils worked successfully in pairs in German to revise the use of co-ordinating and subordinating conjunctions. In a small number of lessons in lower school French and German, where grammatical activities were either unrelated or structures not practised enough, learning was only just sound. Setting helps pupils to learn at appropriate linguistic levels. Provision to take GCSE French in Year 10 encourages able linguists. Those with learning difficulties are well supported and encouraged to participate.
- 8.115 Teaching is good and sometimes very good, particularly when it is imaginative and creative. The target language is used appropriately, as in a Year 8 French lesson on *house and home* supported by good use of the overhead projector, and a Year 10 lesson in Spanish where boys learnt how to describe different states of health. A three group carousel lesson in Year 10 made very good use of teacher time with the aid of the French assistant to help those with linguistic difficulties.
- 8.116 Pupils' work is assessed through a variety of tasks in class and through the regular setting and marking of prep. Marks are recorded and end of year exam results are kept centrally by the head of department to monitor progress and for setting purposes. In almost all books scrutinised, work was set and marked according to the departmental handbook.
- 8.117 The curriculum is well balanced, broadly based and appropriate for the age and ability of the pupils. French and German are offered in Year 7, and in Year 9 boys have the opportunity to take up French, German, Russian or Spanish. The recent introduction of Spanish at Year 9 has proved to be very popular, enhanced by a very well structured course book. All boys study at least one language to GCSE and many continue with two from a very good choice of languages. Choice at AS is dependent on GCSE languages studied but it includes *ab initio* Spanish and Italian in Year 12. Class sizes are small and this encourages pupil participation and learning.
- 8.118 The department has nine full-time and two part-time members; all are very well qualified. Almost all teach two languages, providing flexibility within a department that offers a great deal of choice. Four assistants, two French, one German and one Russian help with the teaching.
- 8.119 Accommodation is bright and airy in a suite of rooms in the main building. Some classrooms are small. With 11 members in the department, seven rooms are not an ideal number for best practice in a subject that requires much organisation of equipment.
- 8.120 The department is very well resourced with a variety of course books and listening material for each year group.
- 8.121 The department is very well managed and led by an experienced head of department with a head of French, German, Spanish and Russian responsible for each language. The assistants contribute to the effectiveness of teaching in the department particularly in the sixth form and with those who experience learning difficulties. The departmental handbook contains all relevant information and schemes of work. The department runs a film society showing European films for enjoyment and development of cultural awareness. The department goes to extensive lengths to promote and organises a variety of exchanges and study tours to France, Germany, Spain and Russia. All members of the department have recently participated in a trip abroad; one indication of their commitment.

Music

- 8.122 Pupils achieve high standards. Attainment in external examinations is very good in relation to pupils' abilities. Results at GCSE are well above the national average for maintained selective schools particularly at A and A* grades. At A level over three quarters of candidates gained A grades in the last five years; again, well above the national average for maintained selective schools. Large numbers of pupils enter for Associated Board and Guildhall examinations, and obtain a high percentage of distinctions, many at grade 8. Nine pupils have won places at Oxbridge over the last four years, including organ and choral scholarships.
- 8.123 In lessons and workbooks, pupils' attainment is good, even though the subject attracts a large number of pupils, not all of whom are specialist musicians. The more able Year 7 pupils can recognise and recall melodies using a variety of rhythms and intervals and they can notate their melodies accurately. By Year 9 they can compose in distinct styles, for example using serialist techniques. They use ICT effectively, the best incorporating dynamics, phrasing and other musical details in their work. At Year 11 advanced listening skills are evident, some pupils being already capable of A level dictation.
- 8.124 The progress of students is good at all ages and rapid in the middle and upper school. By Year 8 evidence of a clear understanding of musical elements, including textures, has emerged. By Year 10 they can identify styles and periods securely. In a Year 13 lesson they were able to discuss the characteristic changes of style in 19th century chamber music, understanding the social and historical conditions.
- 8.125 The quality of pupils' learning and behaviour is mostly very good, although in some lower school lessons it was only sound. Pupils concentrate well and clearly enjoy engaging with the subject, participating in question and answer, willingly demonstrating musical ideas through clapping and singing, and they are articulate in their responses. Pupils show courtesy and respect to their teachers and each other.
- 8.126 The quality of teaching is good, and often very good. Teachers' subject knowledge is excellent and they communicate enjoyment of their work well to the pupils. In the lower years, encouragement is emphasised. In the examination sets teachers are able to extend the more able pupils well beyond the syllabus requirements and give support to those for whom it is necessary.
- 8.127 The accommodation of the department is excellent. The attractive new music school has a large number of teaching and practice rooms and a good technology suite.
- 8.128 Resources are very good. A good collection of orchestral instruments is available for hire to pupils. The number of pianos in the department and boarding houses is large but not all are in good condition and the best are not easily available for practise. The chapel organ is frequently played. A good selection of reference books and CDs is available for pupils, and an extensive library of choir, orchestral, band and chamber music supports the ensembles.
- 8.129 The leadership and management of the subject are very good. The experienced head of department has a positive influence on the teaching, encouraging ambition and dealing with the day-to-day management in a caring and understanding manner. He has a clear vision for the subject, which is well understood by the teaching staff. The active recruitment of instrumentalists, especially for the less popular instruments, has done much to foster the ensemble work. The curriculum is broadly based, with attention given to music from other cultures. Music technology is not offered as an examination subject, but widely utilised. A talented body of instrumental and vocal teachers give individual lessons which are taken by

well over half the boys in the school. The part-time heads of strings and brass contribute significantly to the success of these departments. The practical extra-curricular activity within the department is outstanding (See Activities 8.160). Standards and levels of participation are high. Pupils are challenged musically and show enjoyment and good focus in the creative environment. Staff and pupils work well together and support each other well.

Physical Education

- 8.130 Sport and physical education make a very good contribution to school life. Pupils' attainment in physical education is good in relation to their abilities. High levels of attainment were achieved by Year 9 pupils in a lesson on the bowling action in cricket. Boys demonstrate consistently good levels of understanding of the techniques involved in both cricket and tennis.
- 8.131 Progress in physical education is good for pupils of all ages and abilities. Pupils in a Year 10 shot putt lesson acquired knowledge and skills at a good rate and applied them effectively. Rapid progress is prevented by timetabling of single periods, which give only 20 minutes of activity.
- 8.132 The overall quality of learning is very good. Cooperative and independent learning were seen in a Year 8 athletics lesson. Pupils are very well motivated and attentive in lessons. Behaviour is very good and constructive working relationships are formed both with each other and with staff and this helps with learning and understanding. Good independent learning was observed during a Year 9 cricket lesson, with effective use of target setting to accelerate learning.
- 8.133 The quality of teaching is very good and contributes significantly to pupil's attainment and progress at all stages. Lessons are well organised and planned for pupils of all ages and abilities. Particularly good practice was observed in a Year 8 wet weather lesson. Subject knowledge is good. Very good use is made of teaching assistants and visiting professional coaches, which accelerates learning and increases the provision for gifted and talented pupils. Quantitative assessments are completed in health related fitness. A consistent policy on assessment, well understood by pupils, is required.
- 8.134 The curriculum is sound with sufficient opportunities for physical development if 'the other half' activities are included. Single periods are inadequate for changed activities. Years 7 and 8 do not do formal PE, only sport: the extension of core physical education into Years 7 and 8 would fulfil an educational need, if that can be achieved without detriment to other elements of the curriculum. The scheme of work places a very strong emphasis on team games for which the school has a strong reputation. The addition of more courses in swimming and gymnastics would further strengthen the curriculum. There are no PE courses at GCSE and advanced level, though the school aims to provide opportunities to combine academic excellence and practical sporting excellence.
- 8.135 The facilities, while extensive, are barely adequate for the wide range of PE provision but will be good when the facilities on the main school site for sport and physical education are improved, as planned. The sports hall is the only indoor teaching facility. Storage space for the many different sports is inadequate. The outdoor swimming pool can only be used for a small part of the year. The floodlit artificial surfaces will expand the range and quality of the sporting facilities and enable higher levels of attainment. Department resources are good. Changing facilities for physical education and games are adequate but require urgent refurbishment. The school library contains a good range of publications on sport and physical education. The standard of displays is satisfactory.

8.136 The department is very effectively managed and led. Teachers have specific areas of responsibility. They attend in-service training courses. The sharing of good practice is a major strength of the department. Administrative systems are good but pupil progress and attainment need to be more effectively monitored. The department handbook is comprehensive and it contains a clearly outlined development plan. All members of the physical education staff are qualified in first aid.

Religious Studies

8.137 Overall, attainment is good. Attainment at GCSE is sound and in line with the points average for maintained selective schools over the last three years, though results in terms of A* and A grades have been below the average. GCSE results in 2004 were less than satisfactory. A level results have been comfortably above the national average for maintained selective schools over the past three years in terms of A and B grades. Attainment at A level is good in relation to pupils' ages, abilities and circumstances.

8.138 Attainment is good in the lower school in relation to the pupils' ages, abilities and circumstances. In a Year 7 class, pupils used technical language accurately and responses showed understanding of the Buddhist concept of samsara. In a Year 11 lesson, with carefully modulated input from the teacher, pupils gave balanced assessments in a discussion on prejudice and discrimination. A Year 12 class showed good powers of critical analysis in their examination of Freud. The quality of written work is uneven; mostly good in Years 7 to 9, sound in Years 10-11, and good in Years 12-13.

8.139 Progress was good in Years 7 to 10. Pupils work well with the information given, and are able to apply it to different religious and ethical perspectives. In a Year 8 lesson, pupils responded well to the opportunities to explore religious symbolism, relating it to their own experiences. In the middle school, pupils make sound progress, securing knowledge necessary for the approaching GCSE examinations, using this to illustrate arguments with evidence and examples. In Years 12 and 13 pupils presented with complex philosophical problems made good progress as they drew on their prior learning and applied this to defend and develop arguments.

8.140 The quality of pupils' learning and behaviour is good. In all years, pupils work cooperatively, arguing and discussing in a sensitive, balanced, academic manner. They express themselves effectively while listening with respect to the views and beliefs of others. They show ability to research and assess information, using it to inform their understanding, and as they mature, develop capacity for independent thought.

8.141 The quality of teaching is good, and on occasions very good. Teaching is characterised by careful planning, clear explanations and strong subject knowledge. Teachers encourage pupils to use the departmental library, videos, an interactive whiteboard, power point presentations, group activities, textbooks and an excellent departmental website, and this effectively to stimulate discussion and thought. The website is a highly effective tool for independent learning and research; it contains links to every aspect of the religious studies curriculum, and is easily accessed by pupils. Teaching is always positive, encouraging, relaxed yet purposeful. Relations between staff and pupils are very good.

8.142 The quality of assessment is sound. Written work is marked regularly at every stage. At GCSE, AS and A level, marking is thorough, consistent and an effective tool of assessment for learning. In the lower school, however, some inconsistency between members of the department in the application of the departmental mark scheme reduces clarity and understanding. In line with school policy, members of staff take learning difficulties into account when marking pupils' work, noting these pupils in their mark books.

- 8.143 The curriculum is good. With a change of personnel, the curriculum has undergone radical changes, providing pupils with a broad and carefully structured programme at every level. They have opportunities for biblical study, the study of world religions, the philosophy of religion and moral and ethical issues.
- 8.144 All teachers are very well qualified and experienced religious studies specialists. Three members of staff, including the head of department and one recently qualified teacher, are relatively new to the department. All members form a committed team who benefit from the school's in-service training policy to enhance skills and understanding. The head of department was appraised last year and further appraisals are planned.
- 8.145 The department is accommodated in light, relatively spacious rooms with excellent display space. Resources are sound with an interactive board, overhead projector, television and computers. Pupils are encouraged to use the departmental library and main school library; both are being restocked to include more recent critical works and other books relevant to the courses.
- 8.146 The management and leadership of the department are good and committed to the academic study of religion. The department has clear understanding of the contribution to be made to raising pupils' awareness of religious, spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues.

Short Subject Reports

Drama

- 8.147 Four lessons were observed in Years 10 to 12. A selection of pupils' work was scrutinised. A discussion was held with the head of department.
- 8.148 Both the teaching and the learning were never less than sound, and were sometimes good. Much evidence of enthusiasm for drama in both its curricular and extra curricular manifestations was apparent in observation of pupils and discussion with them.
- 8.149 The drama facilities are outstanding, though enthusiasm for their use is already exerting pressure. Pupils are able to work in a classroom, then move to a studio, to film performances there, and then to transfer to another classroom for further discussion. The department offers excellent opportunities for curricular and extra curricular enrichment. The recent creation of the film unit offers remarkable opportunities for pupils to work alongside professionals. The work of the department is central to links with SSHSK. These links are much appreciated though not without logistical implications.

Information Technology

- 8.150 Three ICT lessons were observed, as well two subject lessons which took place in an ICT room. A discussion was held with the head of department, and a sample of pupils' work was scrutinised.
- 8.151 The quality of the teaching observed was good. In some lessons the teaching was very good or excellent. Lessons were well planned and contained a variety of activities. In a Year 9 lesson on image editing, clear explanations and guidance were given. Pupils were set challenging tasks and the positive relationship between staff and pupils was evident.
- 8.152 The quality of learning was very good. Pupils were fully engaged and learning was a very positive experience. Pupils in Year 7 were enthusiastic in developing their own database. In all lessons, pupils were seen to work independently and with very good motivation.

- 8.153 The ICT rooms are very well equipped with sufficient computers for each pupil. The courses are well structured to ensure progression and pupils have the opportunity to achieve qualifications in ICT. The department runs a range of popular courses for members of the teaching and non-teaching staff.

Achievement and Quality in Activities

- 8.154 The quality of activities is excellent. 'The other-half' extra-curricular programme has a major impact on school life and offers pupils opportunities to experience a very wide range of activities. It is very effectively managed and contributes significantly to the personal development of pupils. All pupils participate in a minimum of two sessions of changed activity each week. Pupils achieved very high standards in the activities observed. Participation levels are very high and this strongly contributes to pupils' educational experience. All members of the academic staff are committed to the activities programme. The performance of pupils is regularly reported in school assemblies and to parents.

Sport

- 8.155 High standards are consistently achieved in team and individual games. A strong fixture list has been established in the school's major games. Very good practice was observed in cricket and tennis. The use of professional coaches has greatly assisted in the development of gifted and talented individuals. Rowing, which is excellent, takes place on the Thames from the school's fine new boat house. Pupils regularly compete at the junior world rowing championships. In 2004, sixteen members of the school boat club represented the country in international competition. The range of sport available is considerable. The programme gives pupils of all physical abilities choice from a diverse range of sporting activities from canoeing to fives to table tennis.

Combined Cadet Force (CCF)

- 8.156 The school's CCF detachment makes an important contribution to the programme of activities. Pupils join the army or RAF sections of the CCF in Year 9 and a significant number continue their involvement into year eleven. Camps are run during school holidays and at weekends. The school's indoor range supports a heavily subscribed shooting club which achieves excellent standards. In excess of 70 boys each year receive expert coaching on the range. Other activities follow authorised programmes of training for both army and RAF sections. A four day expedition to the Lake District enables boys to combine CCF activities with the service element of the Duke Edinburgh's award scheme.

Duke of Edinburgh's Award

- 8.157 The Duke of Edinburgh's award scheme is an impressive component of the extra-curricular programme. Boys are able to satisfy physical, service and skills sections of the scheme. Some day pupils arrange their own service activities within the local community. With guidance from leaders, some gold award participants give service by instructing younger bronze and silver award pupils. Twenty four pupils are working towards their gold award. Expedition training is thorough and gold award students have the opportunity to take part in the Dartmoor Ten Tors event.

Community Service

- 8.158 Pupils undertake an afternoon of service in Year 9. Many extend this commitment in subsequent years. Groups visit elderly residents at local day centres and residential homes. In cooperation with the Oxfordshire Play Association, pupils assist in after-school clubs at

local primary schools. Others help at local charity shops. Links with Abingdon hospital allow aspiring medical students to gain valuable experience.

Music

- 8.159 The quality and quantity of extra-curricular music is very good. The practical extra-curricular activity within the department is outstanding. Standards and levels of participation are high. Pupils are challenged and show enjoyment and good focus in the creative environment. Staff and pupils support each other well. An intensive rehearsal schedule supports the wide scope of the chamber music programme, the best achieving success in national competitions. Solo performances are less frequent, although the best are given concerto opportunities. The chapel choir enjoys a good reputation, but singing outside the choral tradition is limited. Enrichment is provided by participation in the Thames Vale Youth orchestra, musical productions with SSSK, and regular concert visits to Oxford and London. Master classes with eminent musicians are a feature, and the concert tours abroad do much to foster Abingdon's strong and well-deserved musical reputation. There are excellent levels of participation in a wide range of instrumental groups including a high profile orchestra. Very high levels are achieved in the national chamber music competition.

Drama

- 8.160 School drama productions of a very good quality are annually produced, furthering the already strong and established links with SSSK School. An outstanding film unit has been established, in which pupils work alongside professionals and former pupils attaining a national profile. Boys use their music technology skills to compose music for film scripts.

Societies

- 8.161 An excellent junior classics society and a thriving school debating society both achieve regular competitive success. Amongst the well supported activities observed were art and ceramics clubs. Thriving junior and senior history societies meet regularly. The membership of the lower school mathematics club is small but dedicated. Pupils make a very positive contribution to the successful Young Enterprise scheme. Evening activities for boarders make good use of school facilities. Cinema and shopping trips are undertaken on a regular basis. A very active biological society allows pupils to attend an annual dinner with their parents and listen to an academic speaker.

SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 9.1 The inspection was carried out from 25th to 29th April 2005. All subjects of the curriculum were inspected and all members of the teaching staff were observed teaching. The following subjects do not have full reports in Section 8: drama, electronics and ICT. The inspectors visited 192 lessons or parts of lessons, examined extensive samples of work by pupils of different abilities in each year and held formal discussions with these pupils as well as informal discussions with other pupils. They attended 4 assemblies and 31 registration sessions. They observed 54 extra-curricular and sporting activities. They held discussions with 58 teaching and non-teaching staff at various levels in the school. The RI met the chairman and inspectors met 4 governors at an informal meeting and others at the concert. They visited the three boarding houses and the health centre. They analysed the responses of 485 parents to a questionnaire distributed in advance of the inspection and met a group of parents informally at the concert. They examined a wide range of documentation made available by the school.
- 9.2 A bursar from another school joined the RI on the preliminary visit, spending the day with the Bursar's department. The principal findings have been included in the relevant sections of this report.

List of Inspectors

Dr Vivian Anthony	Reporting Inspector, former Secretary of HMC, former headmaster of HMC school.
Mrs Flora Bean	Head of year HMC school
Dr John Godwin	Head of department HMC school
Donald Gorrie	Former deputy headmaster HMC school
Phillip Gott	Director of studies HMC school
David Grossel	Second master HMC school
Dr Timothy Hands	Headmaster HMC school
Dr Stephen Hoskins	Teacher, HMC school
Dr Ian Hotchkiss	Head of department HMC school
Christopher Howe	Head of department HMC school
Mrs Judith Kearney	Former director of studies, HMC school
Mrs Fiona McGill	Deputy head GSA school
Dr Christopher Ray	Headmaster HMC school
Mrs Janice Reid	Head of department, HMC school
David Warwick	Head of department HMC school