

INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS INSPECTORATE

INSPECTION REPORT ON

Stowe School

Full Name of the School	Stowe School		
DfES Number	825 6001		
Address	Stowe School, Buckingham, MK18 5EH		
Telephone Number	01280 818000		
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E-mail Address	<u>enquiries@stowe.co.uk</u>		
Name of Head Master	Jeremy G. L. Nichols		
Chairman of Governors	Sir Nicholas Lyell		
Age Range	13 – 18	Gender	Boys, Years 9 – 11, Girls in Sixth Form
Number of Pupils	589	Number of Boarders	519
Inspection Dates	16 – 20 March 2003		

This inspection report is based on a framework laid down by the Independent Schools Inspectorate (ISI) and agreed with the DFES and OFSTED for the purposes of ensuring that standards are maintained and that the school complies with relevant legal requirements. Recommendations are included to help the school improve. The report will be lodged with the ISI, the Head of the School, the Proprietors, the DFES and OFSTED. The school will provide a summary for all parents free of charge and the full report on request. Other interested parties may have the summary or full report, subject to a charge for copying and postage. The report may not be selectively quoted in the school prospectus or other promotional literature but may be used selectively within the school.

The inspection does not examine the financial viability of the school or investigate its accounting procedures. 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.

The inspection was not carried out in conjunction with the National Care Standards Commission 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.

1. MAIN FINDINGS

Overall Summary

- 1.1 This is a school with many strengths and very few weaknesses. Standards of attainment in relation to pupils' abilities are good and public examination results are well above those of maintained schools nationally and close to those of selective schools. Behaviour is good. Teaching and non-teaching staff are hard working and fully committed to the education and care of the pupils. Teaching is very good across all year groups. Resources for learning are good, but library provision is unsatisfactory. The school provides very well for pupils' personal and social development and has high levels of pastoral care. Boarding provision is variable in quality; some is good, but some boys' accommodation is poor. The quality of boarding life is very good and contributes greatly to the personal development of the pupils. Relationships among pupils and between them and the staff are of a high order. The school is governed and managed very well and the leadership of the headmaster and his senior team is sensitive, humane and wholehearted, and reflects well on their strong commitment to the school. Pupils are very well prepared to make decisions about their adult and working life

What the School Does Well

- 1.2 The school has many strengths, of which the following are the most important.
- Standards of attainment in relation to pupils' capabilities and performance in public examinations are good.
 - Teaching is mainly good and often very good across all age groups.
 - The pupils behave well; they have positive attitudes towards others and show pride in their school and relationships among pupils are friendly and supportive.
 - Teachers and non-teaching staff are highly committed to the school. They work hard to the benefit of the education and care of the pupils.
 - The school provides very well for the care and personal development of the pupils and links with parents and the community are strong. Boarding arrangements contribute greatly to pupils' personal development.
 - The range and quality of the activities provided by the school are very good.

What the School Should Do Better

- 1.3 The school has just one major weakness.
- Library provision is unsatisfactory as a resource to support the curriculum.

Standards of Attainment and Progress in Subjects

- 1.4 At all stages the attainment and progress of pupils are good for their ages, abilities and aptitudes. Results in public examinations at GCSE level and in A-level examinations are well above the national average for all maintained schools and close to the national average for maintained selective schools. Given a relatively broad spectrum of ability at entry, the school provides an environment in which many pupils make good progress to both GCSE and A level.

The Quality of Pupils' Learning, Attitudes and their Behaviour

- 1.5 The quality of pupils' attitudes to learning and of their personal development and behaviour is good for their ages, abilities and aptitudes, and is conducive to learning. In the majority of lessons observed learning was good or better. Pupils are well motivated and co-operative. They behave well in class, around the school and in the locality, are courteous and trustworthy, and show respect for people and property.

The Quality of Teaching

- 1.6 The teaching of all age groups is good and often very good, and contributes effectively to pupils' attainment and progress. A little over three-quarters of the lessons seen were good or better and only a very small number were less than satisfactory. Particularly good teaching was seen in chemistry, geography, history of art, Latin, physical education (PE) and Spanish. Teaching meets very well the needs of all pupils, including those who require special provision or for whom English is an additional language (EAL), although it does not always encourage pupils' active learning skills. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. The planning and organisation of teaching are very good, and make constructive use of assessment of pupils' previous work and performance.

Other Aspects of the School

Attendance

- 1.7 The level of pupils' attendance is excellent and enables them to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the school. Attendance and admissions registers comply with statutory requirements, making good use of the new school database. Routines to check on pupils' whereabouts are generally good and efficient. Pupil lateness to lessons, noted in the last inspection report, continues to be an issue.

Assessment and Recording

- 1.8 The school's systems for assessing and recording are efficient, thorough and appropriate to the needs of the pupils, and their overall quality is good. Appropriate policies are carried out in practice. Mark books are well kept. They reveal, as do the pupils' exercise books and folders, that work is adequately and regularly marked, and this helps to improve performance. The pupils understand the systems used. Assessment is appropriately used in the planning of lessons.

Curriculum

- 1.9 The curriculum provided by the school is good and offers a broad and balanced general education suited to all pupils across the full age and ability range and contributes effectively to their intellectual, physical and personal attainment and development. It is helped in this by a wide provision of extra-curricular activities. The requirements of pupils of different levels of ability and with particular educational needs are appropriately provided for. The curriculum prepares pupils well for the next stage of education or employment.

Teaching and Non-teaching Staff

- 1.10 The qualifications and experience of teaching and non-teaching staff are very good and they are effectively deployed. They are committed and hardworking and contribute greatly to the wellbeing and success of the pupils. The review and development policy is working well, and a very good induction programme is in operation for new staff. Generous provision is made for a programme of staff in-service training (INSET). This programme is effective and is an important element in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. These policies contribute effectively to the efficiency of all aspects of school life. The non-teaching staff make a substantial, valuable and widely-appreciated contribution to the life of the school.

Resources for Learning

- 1.11 The overall quality of resources is good and they are well used to enhance teaching and learning. The range and quality of information and communications technology (ICT) in the school are very good, sometimes outstanding, and it is accessible to pupils and staff. The range, availability, quality and accessibility of textbooks and reference books in subjects are generally good. The provision of other resources for learning is satisfactory but the provision of departmental equipment is generally good.

Libraries

- 1.12 The library facilities throughout the school do not effectively support teaching or personal study. The school has completed thorough research and made detailed plans to provide better library facilities. Currently the management of the library fails to introduce reluctant readers to the pleasures of reading and does not adequately encourage pupils to read widely for information and pleasure. Generally poor use is made of its resources by pupils for personal study and by teachers to support teaching.

Premises and Accommodation

- 1.13 The buildings and grounds are good in overall provision and quality and are used well to enhance teaching and learning. The classrooms and specialist subject areas are generally good and are sufficient in number. However, space in DT, art and music is limited, with restricted storage. Boarding accommodation is variable in quality; that for the girls is good but some boys' accommodation is unsatisfactory. The grounds and the original buildings are inspiring and have an important and highly positive influence on the lives of pupils.

Links with Parents and the Community

- 1.14 Parents are kept well informed about the school and about their children's progress, and links between the school and the local community are varied and extensive. The school's work and curriculum and pupils' experiences are enriched by the provision for voluntary service and work experience and by exchanges and visits abroad. More than half of the parents responded to a questionnaire sent to all parents before the inspection, and the overwhelming majority were positive about the school's provision.

Pupils' Personal Development

- 1.15 The school provides a very good range of opportunities both within the curriculum and in boarding, through which its pupils have the opportunity to develop a system of spiritual beliefs and a moral code, as well as developing appropriately personally, socially and

culturally. The unique environment of the school enriches the personal development of all pupils.

Pastoral Care including Welfare, Health and Safety

- 1.16 The school cares very effectively for the pupils' wellbeing, development and safety through its arrangements for pastoral care and support. The pastoral system makes a very positive and effective contribution to the educational standards and personal growth achieved by pupils. The range and quality of provision for careers education and guidance are excellent and prepare the pupils very well to make decisions about their adult and working life. Measures to promote good discipline and behaviour are effective.
- 1.17 Very good measures are taken to safeguard and promote pupils' welfare; the school has good child protection procedures; all necessary measures to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards have been taken and the school makes every effort to ensure that a safe and secure environment exists for pupils and staff.

Boarding Standards

- 1.18 Most of the recommendations made in the 1999 Social Services Report have been carried out. The exceptions are:
- There are badly fitting and rusted iron windows, damp and some areas of poor carpeting and furnishing in Walpole House.
 - The number of showers in Grafton House is inadequate.
 - The recording of complaints in houses has not yet been accomplished.
- 1.19 It is not now necessary to provide more than one fixed telephone in each house because of the number of pupils who have mobile telephones.
- 1.20 No National Care Standards Commission team took part in the inspection.

Governance and Management

- 1.21 The school is very well led and managed at all levels. Governors, the headmaster and senior managers have a clear view of the ethos of the school and of its aims. Structures ensure that these aims are met, that a good quality of education is provided and that adequate resources are secured for teaching and learning. Planning, particularly of building development, is thorough and ambitious.

Achievement and Quality in Activities

- 1.22 The range and quality of activities are very good. The school attaches considerable importance to extra-curricular activities. Music, drama, sport and art feature strongly, and pupils are provided with numerous opportunities to demonstrate their skills and interests in a wide variety of other fields. They achieve very good standards in each area of activity. The quality of provision results in the good personal development of the pupils.

Progress Made by the School since its Last Inspection

- 1.23 The school has made good progress since the last inspection by an HMC inspection team in February 1997, following which eight recommendations were made. Almost all have

been more than satisfactorily dealt with by the school. Outstanding is the need to ensure pupil punctuality in arriving in lessons and to continue to improve the quality of the fabric and décor of some of the buildings, most notably the boys' boarding houses and the Queen's Temple.

- 1.24 Where other recommendations were made elsewhere in the body of that report appropriate reference to these is made in the succeeding sections.

2. MAIN RECOMMENDATIONS

This report identifies one key issue and makes suggestions that are intended to aid the school's development, to which the school and governors are invited to pay special attention. Only one main recommendation is listed below.

- R1 Library provision should be reviewed to improve its rôle as a major school resource.

3. INTRODUCTION

Characteristics of the School

- 3.1 Stowe School is an independent, day and boarding school for boys aged between 13 and 18 and girls in the sixth form. The school was founded in 1923 by the purchase of Stowe House, once the home of the Dukes of Buckingham and Chandos. It is set in 750 acres of landscaped garden and parkland. Girls were first admitted in September 1974.
- 3.2 At the time of the inspection the school had 589 pupils on roll of whom 299 were in the sixth form, 103 girls and 196 boys. The school has 519 boarders; all of whom are full boarders. Most of the pupils come from professional, business, diplomatic and farming backgrounds nationwide. Pupils from about 20 countries enhance the school's international ethos. The countries mainly represented include Germany and Thailand with six pupils each and Nigeria and China with five each. Other countries represented include Italy, France, Bulgaria, Norway, Russia, Saudi Arabia and India.
- 3.3 No pupil has a statement of special educational need. The school has 53 pupils whose first language is not English. Most are fluent speakers of English, although 24 are receiving support for English as an additional language (EAL). A further 108 pupils have been identified by the school as requiring special educational provision, mainly for specific learning difficulties.
- 3.4 One pupil is in receipt of a government Assisted Place and a further 137 receive remission of fees for a range of scholarships, bursaries, staff concessions and sports awards.
- 3.5 Most of the 91 pupils who entered Year 9 in September 2002 came from preparatory schools countrywide. In 2002, six came from maintained schools and three from abroad. Entry is based on the results of the Common Entrance examination, the 13+ scholarship examination or the school's own assessment tests for those pupils entering from maintained schools or from overseas. Once in Year 9, all pupils take the appropriate Middle Years Information System (MidYIS) test and reading tests administered by the school's skills development department. The MidYIS results are standardised against a

nationally representative sample and suggest that the intake is well above national levels but below that for maintained selective schools. Both the MidYIS and reading tests indicate that proportion of very able pupils is under-represented in the school population.

- 3.6 Few pupils leave before Year 11, although there is a turnover of approximately one in ten pupils below the sixth form; they leave to go on to other schools, sixth-form colleges or other forms of further education.
- 3.7 Entry into the sixth form is strong. In September 2002 55 girls and 10 boys entered Year 12. At 16+, current pupils moving from Year 11 are expected to achieve a minimum of five grade C results at GCSE. External candidates are expected to have a minimum of six at grade C or better. Larger numbers of overseas students enter at this stage.
- 3.8 The school's aim is to encourage pupils to

“Think deeply, think for yourself, think about others.”

In the school's planning discussion document *The Educational Challenge 2000* it is stated that the task is:

“To ensure that very different pupils are all intellectually extended and stimulated by a learning process which is relevant to the demands of modern society and which provides them with opportunities, both inside and outside the curriculum, for individual growth and development.

“To develop the range and mix that can promote co-operation and understanding between those of very different abilities and backgrounds.

“To champion a style of education that has heterogeneity and inclusiveness at its heart, seeking areas of individual excellence with comprehensive competence for all.”

- 3.9 These aims are reflected in various aspects of school life as in the case of the boarding houses. They are referred to in the aims and objectives of individual departments, although these are mostly subject-specific aims.
- 3.10 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
Third Form	9
Fourth Form	10
Fifth Form	11

School	NC
Lower Sixth	12
Upper Sixth	13

Key Indicators

- 3.11 GCSE

Most recently completed Year 11	Average for the last <i>three</i> Year 11s

	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
Entered for 5+ subjects	106	-	106	98	-	98
Achieved 5+ @ A* - C	96%	-	96%	93%	-	93%
Achieved 5+ @ A* - G	98%	-	98%	99%	-	99%
Average score per candidate*	52.1	-	52.1	51.4	-	51.4

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

3.12 A Level and AS

	2002			Average for the last <i>three</i> years		
	Boys	Girls	All	Boys	Girls	All
Average score per candidate A level only	20.7	20.9	20.8	19.8	20.00	19.99
Average score per candidate A level and AS *	24.1	24.6	24.3	20.96	21.2	21.06
Average score per subject entry A level only	6.95	7.19	7.04	6.85	7.14	6.95
Average score per subject entry A level and AS *	9.61	10.8	9.76	7.74	8.34	7.86

* Please note that figures for 2002 include points scored in AS. This will skew the average figures for the last three years.

3.13 Attendance for Second Half of Autumn Term 2002

	Authorised	Unauthorised
Percentage absence	0.34%	0.00%

3.14 Exclusions Over the Previous 12 Months

Temporary exclusions	Permanent exclusions
29	11

4. EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS ACHIEVED BY PUPILS AT THE SCHOOL

Attainment and Progress

- 4.1 At all stages the attainment and progress of pupils are good for their ages, abilities and aptitudes. Results in public examinations at GCSE level and in A-level examinations are well above the national average for all maintained schools and close to the national average for maintained selective schools. Given a relatively broad spectrum of ability at entry, the school provides an environment in which many pupils make good progress to both GCSE and A level.

- 4.2 Good standards of attainment were seen in all subjects, and attainment in lessons and in work inspected foreshadowed the good examination results in the majority of subjects. Attainment was particularly good in Years 10 and 11, and this was carried through into the sixth form. Particularly good attainment was seen in many subjects including a lesson in Year 9 in chemistry where pupils were establishing ionic formulae for magnesium fluoride and aluminium sulphide. Pupils of all ages are articulate and have good literacy skills. They also have good competences in numeracy and ICT, and use these skills well across a range of subjects.
- 4.3 Public examination results in GCSE are good and close to the national average for the nearest equivalent maintained selective schools. Results in individual subjects are commented on in the subject reports. Averaged over the last three years, by the end of Year 11, 93% of pupils achieved five or more grades A* to C compared with 50% nationally. In 2002, 91.3% of entries gained at least a grade C and well over a quarter achieved a grade A* or a grade A. This is well above the national average for all maintained schools, but rather below the 50% average for all maintained selective schools. Subjects performing particularly well include design and technology, music and physical education (PE).
- 4.4 Results at A level are also good and are high in relation to the national average for all maintained schools, with a rising trend over the last three years. In recent years, over half the entries gained A or B grades compared with a 38% national average in all maintained schools. Virtually all students gained at least a grade E. These results represent significant improvements since the previous inspection. Levels of attainment and progress are good throughout the school with the eventual outcome that 96% of the sixth form go on to university and other institutions of higher education.
- 4.5 Pupils of different ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds also attain well in relation to their abilities. On average over the last three years, girls have performed slightly better than boys at A level, but this difference is in line with national standards.
- 4.6 At each stage, pupils, including those who receive support for special educational needs (SEN) and English as an additional language (EAL) make good progress over all subjects. Progress was at least good in seven out of ten lessons, very good in nearly a quarter, and excellent in some. An analysis of MidYIS data confirms good overall progress.
- 4.7 An analysis of A Level Information Systems (ALIS) data indicates that at A level, the majority of pupils perform better than the national average predicted for their GCSE score, thereby representing further good progress in the sixth form. Subjects performing particularly well over the last three years include design and technology, music, geography and business studies.

Quality of Pupils' Learning, Attitudes and Behaviour

- 4.8 The quality of pupils' attitudes to learning and of their personal development and behaviour is good for their ages, abilities and aptitudes, and is conducive to learning. In the majority of lessons observed learning was good or better. Pupils are well motivated and co-operative. Pupils behave well in class, around the school and in the locality, are courteous and trustworthy, and show respect for people and property.

- 4.9 The pupils are competent learners who respond positively in lessons. They communicate well in oral work, and show a good attitude to learning in their written work. Independent work is actively encouraged within a commendable framework of close supervision and assistance when required, but the capacity of some pupils for personal study is still limited. The more able pupils are capable of perceptive analysis and can apply skills and knowledge that have been previously acquired. Most pupils have a high competence in ICT and are using this well to enhance their learning.
- 4.10 The pupils are friendly, courteous and display good self-discipline both in and outside the classroom. They are predominantly smartly dressed and overall conduct is good. Careful consideration is given to the selection of prefects who are admirable ambassadors for the school and whom the other pupils respect. The high numbers of exclusions recorded over the last 12 months was mostly due to a single incident that was handled sensitively and efficiently.
- 4.11 Within and between year groups relationships are positive and pupils are helpful towards each other. They have excellent relationships with staff, based on mutual respect. They have a very strong sense of belonging to the wider school community and a great sense of pride and loyalty is engendered towards both their houses and the school. When the opportunity arises, the pupils are able to work collaboratively, in pairs or groups, and are prepared to take responsibility.
- 4.12 The pupils show a genuine respect for others, including those of different ethnic backgrounds, and for their environment. The school and the grounds are litter free. In a small number of lessons, some behaviour was less than satisfactory.

Attendance

- 4.13 The level of pupils' attendance is excellent and enables them to take full advantage of the opportunities provided by the school. Attendance and admissions registers comply with statutory requirements, making good use of the new school database.
- 4.14 Routines to check on pupils' whereabouts are generally good and efficient. Pupil lateness to lessons, noted in the last inspection report, continues to be an issue.

5. QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROVIDED

Teaching

- 5.1 The teaching of all age groups is good and often very good, and contributes effectively to pupils' attainment and progress. A little over three-quarters of the lessons seen were good or better and only a very small number was less than satisfactory. Particularly good teaching was seen in chemistry, geography, history of art, Latin, physical education (PE) and Spanish. Teaching meets very well the needs of all pupils, including those who require special provision or for whom English is an additional language (EAL), although it does not always encourage pupils' active learning skills. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of their subjects. The planning and organisation of teaching are very good, and make constructive use of assessment of pupils' previous work and performance.

- 5.2 Lessons provide clear expectations of the pupils and make the objectives clear to them. Teachers know their pupils well and they create a very positive learning environment. They make good use of question and answer techniques, and this helps pupils refine and develop their ideas and make good progress.
- 5.3 Resources, including time, are well used in teaching. Increasingly imaginative use is being made of new ICT resources such as digital projectors and interactive whiteboards in science, modern languages, PE, and business studies. In a Year 11 geography lesson, pupils gave electronic presentations that enhanced a debate on issues associated with the destruction of the world's rainforests. ICT was very well used in all year groups for DT project work and folders. Teaching involved good manipulation of imagery using digital cameras and computer in photography and art in the sixth form.
- 5.4 Teachers are very committed to the education of the pupils and often give them individual support outside lesson time through the universal system of regular drop-in clinics. This is a very good initiative and it has a very positive effect on the attainment and progress of the pupils. In one or two cases these clinics were used as a sanction for poor work, thereby detracting from its overall value. It is recommended that teachers disassociate the attendance at clinics from any connection with punishment.
- 5.5 The best lessons, for example in geography, RE, Spanish and English revealed teachers' willingness to challenge pupils to think independently and extend their academic horizons. A Year 11 theology lesson on the impending conflict in Iraq challenged pupils to think about prejudice, corrected misconceptions and involved them in very good discussion of important issues. As a result, they made rapid progress in improving their knowledge and understanding of a complex situation. In a Year 12 lesson in modern languages use was made of the actual Spanish text from the Spanish Foreign Affairs Minister putting the case for war in the Gulf. This triggered very good use of the language in an informed debate on the war.
- 5.6 The number of unsatisfactory lessons was very small; they were poorly planned and did not hold the interest of the pupils. As a result, the progress and attainment of pupils were adversely affected.
- 5.7 Teaching is generally characterised by high expectations but more might be expected of the pupils in terms of active learning both within lessons and in independent study. This was done well in GCSE and other assignments, for example in geography, but teachers could, given the pupils' abilities, be more often innovative in their approach providing a better framework for more active learning for all pupils. More independent learning would underpin the Stoic objective of "thinking deeply, thinking for themselves and thinking about others".
- 5.8 The school has a clear school policy for the setting of 'prep', and homework is set and collected regularly with the objective of improving pupils' learning.

Assessment and Recording

- 5.9 The school's systems for assessing and recording are efficient, thorough and appropriate to the needs of the pupils, and their overall quality is good. Appropriate policies are carried out in practice. Mark books are well kept. They reveal, as do the pupils' exercise books and folders, that work is adequately and regularly marked, and this helps to

- improve performance. The pupils understand the systems used. Assessment is appropriately used in the planning of lessons.
- 5.10 Effective procedures are used to screen pupils on entry to the school, when individual needs are accurately assessed and acted upon. All Year 9 pupils take the MidYIS standardised test of ability, and individuals who are perceived to have special needs are kept under constant review, their particular situations being examined on a twice-yearly basis, recording progress made.
- 5.11 Whole-school assessment focuses on 'Three Weekly Orders' (TWOs), which monitor progress by tracking pupils' attainment and effort on 10 separate occasions during the course of the school year. The use of the school's new information management system is already proving to be beneficial, having all but replaced the previous paper-based system for gathering assessment data. A staff meeting follows, at which discussion takes place regarding individuals who deserve special praise, or who require some form of remedial action, and a system of 'mentions' ensures that no one escapes the net. Pupils take this exercise seriously. Parents receive the information generated by it, and the awards of 'commendations' and 'benes' (both of which can also, over time, be linked to school prizes) are much sought after.
- 5.12 The whole-school marking policy is rather thin in detail, but it provides some useful guidance as to what basic procedures should be followed regarding, for example, the frequency of correction of exercises and written 'preps', and the various ways in which marking should encourage pupils. Departments often amplify these directions in their own handbooks, examples of good practice being found in modern languages, geography and the sciences. In practice, the formative nature of the marking expected ensures that all pupils have the benefit of being shown where they have been successful and where they have made mistakes, and much marking includes suggestions as to how the individual pupil can improve performance.
- 5.13 A significant strength of the school is that academic and pastoral staff equally make good use of assessment and recording to ensure that each pupil's potential is maximised, and that no-one is without the benefit of support, guidance, encouragement and, where appropriate, constructive criticism at any stage of their school career. The quality of assessment may be further enhanced by placing an emphasis on individual self-assessment (to develop systems that are already in operation), and by an exploration of the intrinsic value of target setting to promote learning.

Curriculum

- 5.14 The curriculum provided by the school is good and offers a broad and balanced general education suited to all pupils across the full age and ability range and contributes effectively to their intellectual, physical and personal attainment and development. It is helped in this by a wide provision of extra-curricular activities. The requirements of pupils of different levels of ability and with particular educational needs are appropriately provided for. The curriculum prepares pupils well for the next stage of education or employment.
- 5.15 The curriculum in Year 9 attempts to balance the needs of all subjects. It is more successful in some areas than others and some imbalance arises. For example, close to half the curriculum is devoted to the sciences, modern languages and Latin, while art and DT have only two lessons per week, and PE none. The learning skills course in Year 9 is

a useful recent initiative, and has potential value for students of all abilities. It is not yet formally developed and integrated within the schemes of work of other subject departments. The imaginative and groundbreaking course in visual education, which draws so much on the special environment of the school, is a very distinctive element of the Year 9 curriculum. Consideration should be given to its further development, in order to maximise the impact it makes on artistic, historic and personal education for pupils in this year group.

- 5.16 Beyond Year 9, the curriculum succeeds in its aim of providing a structured option system for GCSE and a wide range of further optional studies at AS and A level. Many subjects are offered, and the Year 10 and 11 curriculum has no significant omissions. The choice of subjects available in the sixth form is wide. Whilst the breadth of the sixth-form curriculum suffers from the absence of a formal programme of non-examined study, it has an important compensation in the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities available to all students.
- 5.17 Considerable thought has been put into the planning of the curriculum, with the needs of pupils of all abilities firmly in mind. The director of studies leads initiatives, and works within an academic committee that reflects the school's faculty structure. Good continuity from year to year is achieved well, and this is properly supported by the full schemes of work that are prepared for most, but not all, subjects.
- 5.18 Efforts to meet the needs of children of lower ability and of those for whom English is an additional language are clearly evident within the curriculum design. Good arrangements are made to challenge students of higher ability, through arrangements, such as the 'symposium', outside the formal curriculum.
- 5.19 Although the curriculum provision is good, the school currently has no overall curriculum statement or rationale based on the school's aims. Such a statement could identify such shortcomings as exist and be used in planning new initiatives such as the review of the Year 9 curriculum.
- 5.20 The school is alert to the requirements of pupils with special educational needs. Some are withdrawn from lessons for one-to-one support. Others attend such classes after sport sessions in the afternoon, when, understandably, fatigue may limit the programme's effectiveness; the placing of some of these lessons after games should be reviewed.
- 5.21 It is recommended that the Year 9 curriculum should be reviewed. Departments should be encouraged to co-operate upon a coherent, school-wide policy for the identification and promotion of learning skills in Year 9 and beyond.

Teaching and Non-teaching Staff

- 5.22 The qualifications and experience of teaching and non-teaching staff are very good and they are effectively deployed. They are committed and hardworking and contribute greatly to the wellbeing and success of the pupils. The review and development policy is working well, as is the induction programme for new staff. Generous provision is made for a programme of staff in-service training (INSET). This programme is effective and is an important element in enhancing the quality of teaching and learning. The non-teaching staff make a substantial, valuable and widely-appreciated contribution to the life of the school.

- 5.23 The age profile of the teaching staff is well balanced, enabling pupils to benefit from the continuity and stability offered by long-serving teachers and from more recent appointments that broaden the range and experience of the staff. Teaching loads allow time to contribute to activities, and those with posts of responsibility are given a fair allocation of timetable remission. The good teacher-pupil ratio of 1:7 enhances the educational standards achieved, enabling small class sizes and individual attention for pupils with particular needs.
- 5.24 The school is fulfilling its obligation to ensure that all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, who have substantial contact with pupils, have Criminal Record Bureau checks.
- 5.25 The short induction programme for new teachers is well founded and includes opportunities to meet other staff and discuss issues as well as providing an introduction to discipline procedures and to using of the school's ICT provision. The length of the induction is sufficient for experienced teachers, but inexperienced teachers do not always have as much support as they need. The school is meeting regulatory requirements for the induction of newly qualified teachers (NQTs) and it is recommended that the programme is extended to include provision for inexperienced and unqualified teachers. Good induction training is also provided for non-teaching staff, particularly the science support staff.
- 5.26 The provision for INSET is good. Teachers are encouraged by the school to take advantage of INSET. Recent subjects for discussion at annual in-house staff-training sessions included issues surrounding risk assessment for educational trips and visits and unsociable behaviour. Teachers have attended a variety of useful courses including those provided by examination boards to exemplify the new specifications. Teachers are required to feed back their findings to their departments. Additionally, both teaching and non-teaching staff have undertaken courses relating to first aid, health and safety, ICT and boarding issues.
- 5.27 The system of staff review is well developed. The review and professional development (RPD) process aims to recognise individuals' abilities and contributions to the school and to identify staff development needs. The system includes full reviews, involving lesson observation, every two years. In other years a target review is completed. Teachers see the RPD process as a positive and effective experience.

Resources for Learning

- 5.28 The overall quality of resources is good and they are well used to enhance teaching and learning. The range and quality of ICT in the school is very good, sometimes outstanding, and is accessible to pupils and staff. The range, availability, quality and accessibility of textbooks and reference books in subjects are generally good. The provision of other resources for learning is satisfactory but the provision of departmental equipment is generally good.
- 5.29 The range and quality of ICT hardware in the school is very good. Provision in the dedicated ICT rooms and in the science department, together with computers in boarding houses, provide a ratio of one computer for every four pupils. Many of these machines have Internet access; all are linked to the school intranet giving the opportunity to use departmental software. All computers are available to pupils throughout the day and the main computer room is also open and staffed four evenings a week; most are also available in the evenings. A new network manager and very proficient support staff

manage the equipment well. Computers are available for staff use in all academic departments. The provision of data projectors is very good and some departments, notably geography and chemistry, use them very well. The school has 21 of these projectors, of which eight are mobile and available with laptop computers from the audio-visual department, for use in any classroom. This is a substantial and growing provision. Interactive whiteboards are used in some departments, including the sciences and art; very good use was seen in chemistry, enhancing both teaching and learning.

- 5.30 The sciences are well resourced, and the art department has a good small etching studio, complete with etching press. The provision of textbooks and reference books in subjects is generally good. Art history has a very good library. Music has a wide range of scores and sheet music, CDs, music instruments, and the 'Mozart Trio Library' of vocal scores, a substantial bequest. The PE department is adequately equipped at all levels, and is very well resourced for games.
- 5.31 The skills development centre, created in 1991, has a staff of seven serving about 100 pupils regularly, many weekly, with much support from the ICT department with word processors, and software for developing memory, numeracy and literacy skills. The careers centre gives much valued advice and UCAS support. The International Centre is an important resource, and assists with trips, tours abroad and gap year.
- 5.32 Beyond Stowe, the 'bothy' in the Cairngorms is an important and well-used asset. It is maintained and used for outdoor pursuits. The Luffield group of 12 local schools has its own web site, holds an annual subject day with co-operative working in groups, and organises a three day festival in July involving some 200 children. These meetings are reported to provide an opportunity for worthwhile collaboration between pupils from differing backgrounds.
- 5.33 The school has three minibuses, with a fourth used for the school's beagle pack.

Libraries

- 5.34 The library facilities throughout the school do not effectively support teaching or personal study. The school has completed thorough research and made detailed plans to provide better library facilities. Currently the management of the library fails to introduce reluctant readers to the pleasures of reading and does not adequately encourage pupils to read widely for information and pleasure. Generally poor use is made of its resources by pupils for personal study and by teachers to support teaching.
- 5.35 The main library is presently housed in an elegant room very conducive to private study. The books are generally insufficient in range and quality although, usefully, a number of books are loaned for departments from the county library. The range of books in the PE, music, art and art history department libraries is good. The modern foreign languages, mathematics, economics and business studies libraries are small and do not provide effective support for teaching and learning. Some house libraries contain useful collections of textbooks but also some old fiction which should be replaced by books more suited to modern teenage tastes.
- 5.36 All library premises and stock need more effective management. Supervision is inadequate to prevent loss. Cataloguing is incomplete. Library skills are taught to most new pupils but not all. Over half of the main library's annual budget is spent on loans from the county. Of the rest, about £10 per pupil is spent annually on books or journals,

but only one book per pupil is registered as having been loaned in the last year. Little use was seen of the library as a learning resource to encourage voluntary independent study or to attract those whose literacy skills are in greatest need of improvement. The library is poorly provided with ICT and has only two computers, although these are connected to the Internet. The provision does not include CDs, DVDs, audio or video resources, nor does it provide an attractive display of new acquisitions, journals, or a cuttings service for departments.

- 5.37 The rôle that the libraries play as a resource for the pupils' learning and personal development is limited. The school should proceed with its library development plan, consider cataloguing the books in all the departmental libraries into the central database and installing networked computers in the main library. Resources should be secured by means of some form of supervised computer loans system.

Premises and Accommodation

- 5.38 The buildings and grounds are good in overall provision and quality and are used well to enhance teaching and learning. The classrooms and specialist subject areas are generally good and are sufficient in number. However, space in DT, art and music is limited, with restricted storage. Boarding accommodation is variable in quality; that for the girls is good but some boys' accommodation is unsatisfactory. The grounds and the original buildings are inspiring and have an important and highly positive influence on the lives of pupils.
- 5.39 School occupies a single magnificent site of both architectural and natural beauty that is partly shared and maintained by the National Trust. It is easy to agree with sentiments expressed in the school prospectus that describe it as "a perfect environment for thinking". The site comprises a large campus of about thirty buildings of various ages scattered around the estate. Given the wide spread of the campus and the number of buildings, efforts have been made to provide suited accommodation for subjects.
- 5.40 The main building dates from the 1670s. Others have been added at various times since the school's inception in 1923, sometimes with a remarkable lack of architectural sensitivity. These include some indifferent classroom blocks and boarding accommodation. The grounds are a very great asset to the school and provide generously for games and recreation as well as being an excellent emotional space conducive to teaching and learning. With grade 1 listed buildings in grade 1 landscaped gardens in a grade 1 conservation area, development possibilities are severely limited.
- 5.41 Departmental accommodation is generally suitable in size and number of classrooms although some, such as art and DT, are cramped and music is inadequate in terms of size and general provision. Standards of maintenance and décor are generally adequate whilst display is very good in most areas.
- 5.42 Boarding accommodation is variable in quality. Some boys' houses are less than satisfactory being scruffy with poor standards of decoration, rusting iron window frames, stained and ripped carpets and very poor, old furniture in the bedrooms and dormitory. Girls' accommodation is more modern, well appointed and comfortable.
- 5.43 Facilities for games and PE are good. The school has excellent games fields that are very well maintained, a good six-lane swimming pool, an all-weather pitch and new squash courts. Only the sports hall is a little tired looking with inadequate lighting.

- 5.44 The school is aware of the shortcomings and has a rolling programme of building development.

Links with Parents and the Community

- 5.45 Parents are kept well informed about the school and about their children's progress, and links between the school and the local community are varied and extensive. The school's work and curriculum and pupils' experiences are enriched by the provision for voluntary service and work experience and by exchanges and visits abroad. More than half of the parents responded to a questionnaire sent to all parents before the inspection, and the overwhelming majority were positive about the school's provision.
- 5.46 Parents receive good information in two full reports and one mini-report each year. For full reports, parents receive comments from all their son or daughter's teachers, their tutor and housemaster or housemistress. They also receive a report from the pupils themselves, and from any extra-curricular teaching they receive, including music lessons. Reports are clear and informative, and not only comment on past achievements, but also offer guidance for the future. Trials on a new computer-based system of report writing begin later this year.
- 5.47 Arrangements for meeting parents are good. The school holds two parents' meetings each year for pupils in Years 9 and 12, and one for each of the other year groups. These meetings enable parents to meet their child's teachers, to discuss academic progress and to consider plans for the future. Parents are also encouraged to make regular contact with housemasters or housemistresses to check on their child's progress.
- 5.48 More than half of the parents responded to a questionnaire sent to all parents before the inspection, and the overwhelming majority were positive about the school's provision. A small number of parents raised particular concerns, most notably about food and catering and about boarding accommodation. The inspectors found no evidence to support criticism of the former, but some evidence to support criticism of the latter, as outlined in the report on boarding below.
- 5.49 Parents are kept very well informed about day-to-day and termly activities. Information about school activities is provided through regular mailings to parents, and through the headmaster's termly letter. The impressive school magazine, *The Stoic*, provides a full and lively record of the school year. Parents are invited to school and house functions throughout the year including speech day and the carol service, games fixtures, music and drama events, and meetings in connection with careers and higher education.
- 5.50 The school has many very good links with the local community. Pupils involved in the community service scheme visit primary schools in the area, help out in charity shops and visit senior citizens in their own homes or in residential communities. The annual Christmas party for senior citizens is reported as being much appreciated by those who attend. Local individuals and groups make good use of school facilities at appropriate times. Young instrumentalists from the local area are invited to join orchestras and music groups that rehearse at the school.
- 5.51 Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are actively encouraged to find work experience placements in the holidays, and most do so. Diaries are kept and reports written on their return to school. Older pupils attend careers experience courses run by the Independent Schools Careers Organisation, and the careers department invites representatives from local

businesses to talk to pupils on a regular basis. Links between the science department and a commercial company have led to the development of software to the benefit of both parties.

- 5.52 Links with local schools take place through a consortium of twelve schools working with each other throughout the year and culminating in the local annual Luffield Festival. Pupils throughout the school are also involved in the 'Neighbourhood Engineers' scheme.
- 5.53 The very good international initiatives are carefully co-ordinated and include language exchanges, study and sports tours, and expeditions, all of which contribute very well to pupils' learning and experience.
- 5.54 The school's website is good, and an important source of information for pupils, parents, former pupils and others interested in the school.

6. PUPILS' PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PASTORAL CARE

Pupils' Personal Development

- 6.1 The school provides a very good range and of high quality opportunities both within the curriculum and in boarding, through which its pupils have the opportunity to develop a system of spiritual beliefs and a moral code, as well as developing personally, socially and culturally. The unique environment of the school enriches the personal development of all pupils.
- 6.2 The range and quality of opportunities offered through the curriculum and other activities to provide pupils with knowledge and insight into values and beliefs are very good. Pupils are enabled to develop their spiritual awareness and knowledge of self. The school has a strongly Christian ethos that nurtures spiritual growth through chapel-based assemblies, a Sunday service and a weekly communion service. An active Christian Union meets regularly and initiates Bible study groups, one for each of the first three years and three for the sixth form. Pupils also run their own weekly prayer meeting. The chaplain provides good spiritual support. He visits the boarding houses twice a week and is available in the chaplaincy when not teaching. Three Lenten addresses, held annually, motivate up to 150 pupils to meet Christians from outside who come into school to teach religious studies lessons and present the gospel. Lessons in art, music and theology assist pupils develop a wider spiritual knowledge.
- 6.3 The provision made by the school for moral development is very good. The curriculum and other aspects of school life enable pupils to develop a moral code and to learn to make responsible and reasoned judgements on moral and ethical issues. Tutors develop moral themes and values in the weekly personal, social and health education (PSHE) lessons, where topics covered include self-appraisal, bullying issues, drugs and alcohol awareness. Moral issues are raised in many subjects, including geography, theology, history and English. In the boarding houses housemasters and housemistresses, together with tutors, monitor the moral development of pupils.
- 6.4 The school provides a range of very good opportunities through which pupils learn to appreciate their own cultural traditions and the diversity and richness of others. The whole setting of the school, the splendour of the buildings and the grounds create an

ambiance that enhances each pupil's cultural development. A visual education course, based on the buildings and gardens, is taught to all Year 9 pupils. Art, music and drama all offer opportunities for pupils to improve their cultural knowledge. The wide range of cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds of pupils present in the school community fosters an understanding of other cultures. By such contacts, pupils develop a sense of equality and tolerance of different traditions, cultures and values. A range of cultural visits overseas and regular cultural lectures in school further develop a pupil's cultural understanding.

- 6.5 The school's provision for pupils' social development is very good. Pupils are encouraged to relate positively to one another, take responsibility, and participate fully in the school community. Very good social interaction is evident in the boarding houses and tutor groups. Boarding houses select officers from among senior pupils to take responsibility for aspects of the day-to-day organisation of the house and for mentoring younger pupils; taking on such rôles enables older pupils to develop positive attitudes to others. House duties and responsibilities within activities demand commitment and reliability from pupils in all years. School prefects, opportunities in the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme and community service all give opportunities for extra responsibility. All Year 12 students take part in a leadership and skills course monitored by their tutors. In lessons, pupils work in co-operation with others and in games a strong sense of teamwork is integral to the school games policy. Staff and senior pupils and prefects are visibly excellent rôle models for all pupils.

Pastoral Care including Welfare, Health and Safety

- 6.6 The school cares very effectively for the pupils' wellbeing, development and safety through its arrangements for pastoral care and support. The pastoral system makes a very positive and effective contribution to the educational standards and personal growth achieved by pupils. The range and quality of provision for careers education and guidance are excellent and prepare the pupils very well to make decisions about their adult and working life. Measures to promote good discipline and behaviour are effective.
- 6.7 Very good measures are taken to safeguard and promote pupils' welfare; the school has good child protection procedures; all necessary measures to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards have been taken and the school makes every effort to ensure that a safe and secure environment exists for pupils and staff.
- 6.8 Housemasters and housemistresses, ably supported by their assistants, matrons, tutors and prefects, create a homely environment for boarding and day pupils in which they can flourish academically and in personal qualities. Each house team knows its pupils well and problems are dealt with before they become serious. The school counsellor meets all the pupils on entry and is available by telephone when required.
- 6.9 Academic and personal progress is closely monitored, partly by tutors. Comprehensive records, including those for attendance at extra-curricular and sporting activities, are kept within each house. Weekly tutorials provide discussions concerning careers opportunities and personal relationships. However, a few tutors lack the specialist knowledge to give advice on subject options and they need more specialist support from the careers department.
- 6.10 Pupils are very well prepared to make decisions about their adult and working life. The quality of guidance is very good. They are screened for aptitudes, work experience is

encouraged and they receive good advice about higher education in the UK and abroad and for any gap year taken. They have interview practice and meet with services liaison officers. Study tours and language exchanges are arranged for all who wish to take part, encouraging students to look to the wider world beyond the school.

- 6.11 The school has a well-documented system of rewards and punishments that is familiar to the pupils and is generally successful in encouraging good discipline and behaviour. Effective policies prevent or deal with incidents of bullying or harassment when they occur. Records of all punishments are kept.
- 6.12 Very effective measures are taken to safeguard and promote pupils' welfare. The very good, comprehensive staff handbook contains sections on numerous welfare issues including: child protection, substance abuse, the code of conduct, anti-bullying policy, accident and emergency procedures, minibus driving and health and safety. It does not, however, include guidance on the recognition of eating disorders and subsequent support for pupils, although it is clear that the PSHE course and the arrangements for medical care are sensitive to these issues. The school should consider including such guidance in the handbook. The handbook is central to the effective day-to-day running of the school. The school doctor is the independent listener required under the Children Act, to whom complaints may be referred.
- 6.13 Appropriate child protection procedures are in place. The senior master is the designated child protection officer. She trains all academic staff in this important area and also runs courses for the matrons. All new housemasters attend the Boarding Schools' Association (BSA) course "Child Protection and the Legal Framework of Boarding". Day-to-day pupil welfare is the responsibility of the tutors and house staff, and they are key figures in the pastoral organization. Difficult problems and issues may be referred to senior staff as appropriate. Reference may also be made to a sister in the sanatorium, doctor, chaplain or counsellor. If the school has exhausted its own helping rôle, referrals may be made to outside agencies but only following consultations with parents. A number of telephone help lines are available to pupils.
- 6.14 Arrangements for implementing health and safety matters are good. Overall responsibility for health and safety is vested in the governing body one of whom is appointed to oversee health and safety matters. Authority is delegated to the headmaster and bursar for day-to-day implementation of the policy. The bursar is the school's health and safety officer. He chairs the health and safety committee that meets approximately every six weeks. The committee has appropriate representation from each of the bursarial, house, teaching and non-teaching staff.
- 6.15 The school has a full and well-documented health and safety policy aimed at providing and maintaining safe and healthy working conditions for all. Manuals are available in boarding houses and departments. Specialist health and safety consultants are employed to advise on legal, practical and technical issues and risk assessment. Individual departments have written health and safety policies and full risk assessments are provided in these areas. Risk assessment for all school trips was recently revised and upgraded and one member of staff is qualified in off-site safety management and offers training in this area.
- 6.16 The provision for safeguarding and promoting the health of pupils is very good. The school medical centre is open 24 hours a day during term time and is served by a team of five registered general nurses one of whom is constantly on duty and two of whom attend

all home matches on Saturdays. Two are involved with the school's PHSE programme. They also help with the Duke of Edinburgh Award scheme. They are highly valued by staff and pupils. Medical practitioners attend daily and a female doctor is available. The medical centre is very well appointed with attractive wards. Appropriate arrangements are in place for the storage, administration and recording of medication.

- 6.17 In the boarding houses most matrons are first aid trained together with 10 others on the domestic and support staff. Courses are offered periodically to all staff, including teachers. First aid boxes are provided around the school and these are checked and replenished by the house keeper termly.
- 6.18 Opinion varies as to the quality of the food. Some pupils complained vociferously and parents made a number of adverse comments in their responses to the questionnaire. On balance, however, most pupils expressed satisfaction with the meals, and the inspectors found there to be a satisfactory choice of hot and cold meals including a vegetarian option. The food is balanced, nutritious and available in quantity. The school has a pupils' food committee that submits suggestions to the catering manager and he visits the boarding houses canvassing opinion of the food.
- 6.19 Necessary means to reduce the risk from fire and other hazards have been taken. The staff handbook contains procedures for emergency evacuation of buildings. Inspection of the premises by the local fire authority took place in January and February last year, and the subsequent fire safety officer's letter states that all recommendations have been acted upon. Planned fire practices are organised termly. These are fully logged and registers are taken. However, the department reported that fire practices have not taken place in the science department during the past two years.
- 6.20 A list of minor health and safety concerns was given to the school.

Boarding Standards

- 6.21 Most of the recommendations made in the 1999 Social Services Report have been carried out. The exceptions are:
- There are badly fitting and rusted iron windows, damp and some areas of poor carpeting and furnishing in Walpole House.
 - The number of showers in Grafton House is inadequate.
 - The recording of complaints in houses has not yet been accomplished.
- 6.22 It is not now necessary to provide more than one fixed telephone in each house because of the number of pupils who have mobile telephones.
- 6.23 No National Care Standards Commission team took part in the inspection.

7. THE MANAGEMENT AND EFFICIENCY OF THE SCHOOL

Governance and Management

- 7.1 The school is very well led and managed at all levels. Governors, the headmaster and senior managers have a clear view of the ethos of the school and of its aims. Structures ensure that these aims are met, that a good quality of education is provided and that

adequate resources are secured for teaching and learning. Planning, particularly of building development, is thorough and ambitious.

- 7.2 The school benefits from the enthusiastic support of a governing body that incorporates a wide variety of skills and experience. An extensive committee structure enables governors to monitor school performance and to plan for developments in the areas of finance, education and building development. Regular contact, both formal and informal, is maintained between governors and school managers. Relationships, particularly between the headmaster and chairman of governors, are open, honest and supportive. The executive committee of the governing body is an effective addition to the strategic leadership of the school.
- 7.3 The school management team draws on the talents of a wide range of senior staff, who meet regularly, in various combinations. The headmaster is a key member of this team, as well as being its popular, dynamic and highly respected leader. Job descriptions are clear, but tend to catalogue tasks rather than to identify and define areas of management responsibility. Lines of accountability are not clear in all cases.
- 7.4 Management of academic departments and of pastoral teams is generally effective and professional. Although not always formally defined, responsibilities in these areas are recognised and accepted. Departmental finances are almost always well managed and standards of teaching are monitored. In the interests of streamlined decision making, academic management and policy making work through a faculty structure, under the chairmanship of the director of studies. This is effective and is a good basis for future planning.
- 7.5 Housemasters and housemistresses meet regularly with the headmaster, and separately under the chairmanship of the senior housemaster and the senior master. The process for pastoral policy making is, therefore, thorough. However, precise management rôles in this area are not always entirely clear.
- 7.6 The special nature of the Stowe site means that a large proportion of the time of the governors, the headmaster and the bursarial staff must be devoted to planning the development of the buildings and the estate. This planning is effective. Processes also exist for planning the development of education and marketing. These various planning processes could be further integrated so that the school can be seen to be operating according to a single strategic vision covering all aspects of school development.
- 7.7 Routine administration is generally thorough and efficient, helped by the introduction of an electronic administration system. The development of the school intranet has made e-mail communication among staff and between staff and pupils notably efficient. This is not, however, regarded by the school as a substitute for valuable and rewarding interpersonal contact. The bursar and other members of the school management team keep a close watch on the effective deployment of human and material resources.
- 7.8 All statutory requirements are met. The school already has a plan to accommodate access for the disabled. A complaints procedure is publicised to all parents.
- 7.9 It is recommended that job descriptions at all levels of management are reviewed with the aim of defining precise areas of management responsibility and clear lines of accountability for staff. It is also recommended that efforts be made to ensure that the

school's process for development planning allows the proper integration of educational, marketing and building ambitions.

8. ACHIEVEMENT AND QUALITY IN SUBJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

Achievement and Quality in Subjects

English

- 8.1 Pupils achieve good standards overall in relation to their abilities. Pupils' abilities vary widely within each year group, but attainment is good overall in Years 9, 11 and 13. The best are already asking perceptive questions in Year 9 and have well-developed oral skills, often beyond their skills in reading and writing. By Year 11 the variation in attainment is still apparent with the best writing being very good; in one essay, a pupil was analysing the use of the narrator's voice in Conrad's *Typhoon*, while the weakest were struggling to use the accepted format to write a play-script. By the sixth form, similar disparities in reading skills are still apparent; from pupils struggling to grasp the style of tabloid newspapers in re-sit GCSE classes to class discussions on symbols and images in *King Lear*. Whatever their ability, all pupils achieve good standards in relation to their capabilities.
- 8.2 Results in public examinations at GCSE are good, well above the national average for all maintained schools and also above average for selective maintained schools in English Literature although below that average in English. A-level results are well above the national average for all maintained schools. In this subject boys do better than the girls at Stowe.
- 8.3 Pupils' progress in English across all years and abilities, including those who receive learning support and support for EAL, is good. Many pupils whose reading and writing skills on entry are below average for their age, achieve a C grade at GCSE. By Year 11, the best pupils' reading skills have reached A* level, as when drawing together the threads of a theme or character presentation in *Romeo and Juliet*. The best writing in Year 11 shows equally good progress as in a science-fiction story that controlled the reader's response with great precision and skill by means of a finely tuned ear for words. By Year 13, good progress continues, as seen in the complexity of the texts set for study as well as in the written and oral responses they evoked. For example, pupils' essays on modernist influences in Greene and Conrad were as accomplished as comparative analyses of language-use in Dickens and Hardy. In lessons the ambiguities in images of nature that surround Cordelia in *King Lear* were extensively explored.
- 8.4 The quality of learning and behaviour in lessons is good. Pupils are attentive, well motivated and enjoy co-operating in pair and group work. Probing into the meaning of demanding texts abounds. Year 9 pupils were incisively dissecting Ted Hughes' *Moors*. Pupils could concentrate increasingly well and by Year 11 were writing class essays of good quality in a silent working atmosphere. However, not enough good note taking occurs. The content of written work is often good but in a number of cases lacked care in its presentation and use of secretarial skills. A more detailed and analytical level of self-assessment and a more effective way for junior pupils to monitor and record their own skills development are needed.

- 8.5 The quality of teaching across all age groups is good, often very good and, in some cases, excellent. The needs of pupils who require special needs support or for EAL are met largely outside the department. The most literate are generally well catered for, and a teacher qualified in teaching pupils with specific learning difficulties teaches those who require support for SEN. Targeted support for the individual needs of pupils of average and higher abilities or written suggestions about how to improve work are inadequate. Teachers know their subject very well but are not all equally good at teaching study skills or using a variety of approaches to suit particular sets or pupils. Classroom control is very good; lessons proceeded at a pace appropriate to the abilities of the pupils and often contain a variety of tasks to maintain interest and motivation. Short-term plans within the demands of the specifications were good but schemes of work, especially in Year 9, were lacking.
- 8.6 The leadership and management of the department are effective. Regular informal communication amongst the English teachers supplements department meetings. Their agendas include training in the requirements of the specifications and arrangements for a wide range of extra-curricular activities including debates and theatre visits. The head of department reviews the performance of his staff and recommends improvement where appropriate.
- 8.7 Currently the oversight and monitoring of the development of literacy skills in all subjects for those of low and average ability is not as effective as it might be, and it is recommended a whole-school approach to this be implemented. More supporting materials and schemes of work for the teaching of Year 9 should be available within the department.

Mathematics

- 8.8 Overall, pupils achieve good standards in relation to their abilities. Attainment from Years 9 to 11 is good in all skill areas. In particular, pupils in lower sets show a good level of competence for their ability. Algebraic skills were shown to be sound in lessons and in their written work. In a few lessons pupils displayed mental skills in line with their ability, but in others there were pupils who were less adept. It is recommended that mental starters be introduced to lessons on a regular basis. Interesting wall displays in classrooms include work using statistical and graphical packages. By Year 13, students achieve a satisfactory and occasionally good standard in relation to their ability, as seen in pupils' understanding of moments of forces.
- 8.9 Results in public examinations at GCSE are well above the national average for all maintained schools and close to the national average for all maintained selective schools. Of the 107 pupils who took GCSE mathematic in 2002, close to nine in ten gained at least a grade C and 18% grade A* or A. The proportion of pupils gaining grade A* or A is low and is related to the relatively small proportion of very able pupils in the year group. Results at A level are satisfactory and are in line with the national average for all maintained schools.
- 8.10 Pupils across all year groups and of all abilities, including those with special needs or EAL, make good and sometimes rapid progress in lessons, and their written work showed rapid progress across the year. In some lessons, rapid progress was made, as in the case of a lesson that progressed from using Pythagoras' theorem to find the length of different sides of a triangle to the application of Pythagoras' theorem to a real-life problem. On rare occasions progress is limited by teaching that does not challenge the pupils

- appropriately and that does not give the pupils the opportunity to explore new ideas independently.
- 8.11 The pupils are well motivated and keen to learn. Students studying further mathematics were prepared to try out new ideas with vectors and their willingness to think enhanced their understanding. Pupils arrive promptly to lessons and settle to work quickly. Pupils of all abilities are always eager to answer questions orally. Mutual respect is evident between pupils and also between the teacher and the pupils. This is particularly noticeable in lower ability sets where no embarrassment is attached to making errors. Pupils work co-operatively to solve problems as was seen in Years 12 and 13 where there was often a team feeling amongst smaller groups.
- 8.12 Most of the teaching across all years is at least good. Teachers are firm and friendly, encouraging and cajoling their pupils to succeed. Material is adjusted to suit the ability range of the pupils and lessons are flexible enough to allow for a change of direction if the pupils encounter problems. Lessons are paced well and include a good balance of reinforcement, whole class activity and individual work. In most lessons, a due balance between consolidation and the acquisition of new skills is achieved. Teachers are aware of, and give extra help to, pupils with special educational needs and pupils for whom English is an additional language. Practical demonstrations, for example swinging the classroom door to model taking moments, aided the understanding of all students. Little investigative work occurs in Year 9, and the scheme of work does not allow for this throughout the year. It is recommended that small, regular investigational tasks and logical problems be introduced into the Year 9 scheme of work. Valuable additional help is given out of lessons in a mathematics clinic.
- 8.13 Work is marked regularly and the majority of the department follow the departmental marking policy. Comments on pupils' written work are encouraging and help pupils improve their performance.
- 8.14 Generous staffing has facilitated extra sets in some years. Smaller set sizes enhance the learning potential of pupils in these groups. The department's involvement in INSET is good; teachers regularly attend in-service training courses and feed back their findings to the department.
- 8.15 The mathematics classrooms include a staff workroom sufficiently large to accommodate the weekly departmental meeting. This provides a good departmental base with centralised resources and facilitates good communication and teaching. The department is successfully implementing an ICT policy. Good use is made of software programs, particularly graphical and statistical packages. The departmental member responsible for ICT is a part of a successful inter-departmental development group. A limited number of reference books is available for pupils and this limits the fully effective widening of pupils' mathematical horizons. It is recommended that a wider range of mathematics books is made available in the library.
- 8.16 Departmental management is excellent, with strong delegation and a sense of shared responsibility for the education and welfare of pupils.

Science

General

- 8.17 All pupils in Years 9 to 11 study physics, chemistry and biology as separate subjects. At the beginning of Year 10, a small number choose to study for three separate sciences at GCSE, but the majority choose a dual science option.
- 8.18 Attainment at grades A* to C in dual award science are good and are in line with the national average for selective schools, although grades A* and A results have been below this average. This reflects the low proportion of the most able pupils in the year group. Over the last three years, with an average of 165 entries, the average achievement at grades A* to C has been 88%, but at grades A* and A it has been 22%.
- 8.19 The three science departments are housed in one teaching block, with adequate laboratory space and preparation rooms. The departments are well resourced, and these resources are well used to the advantage of pupils' learning, and they have very good technical support. The science faculty has a large ICT facility.
- 8.20 The overall management of the science faculty is good. The chairman of the faculty of science, who is also head of biology, holds weekly meetings with the other departmental heads, to co-ordinate the work of the three departments and to encourage a consistent approach, particularly to issues of health and safety.

Biology

- 8.21 Pupils' attainment overall in biology is variable in relation to their abilities; sound in Year 9, with pupils generally new to biology, but good in Years 10 and 11. In Year 12, pupils gave a good computerised presentation on cell structure using an interactive whiteboard; they displayed a good standard of knowledge and understanding. Good understanding of complex ideas such as homeostasis was revealed in Year 13 lessons. Pupils with special needs and EAL attained in line with and often well in relation to their abilities.
- 8.22 Results in public examinations at GCSE level are good, and in line with the national average for maintained selective schools. Of the 50 entrants in the three years 2000 to 2002, only one failed to achieve a grade C and 25 gained either a grade A* or grade A. AS examination results have been satisfactory. At A level, results are good and above the national average for all schools. In the three years 2000 to 2002, just over half the 59 entrants achieved grades A or B, with only two achieving less than a grade E. The department has had a good record in students gaining entry to universities with high entry requirements.
- 8.23 Pupils' progress overall in biology, including that of pupils who receive support for special needs and EAL, is good in relation to their abilities. Pupils in a Year 11 triple-award lesson made rapid progress in learning about genetics and cystic fibrosis. Over a longer period, in the scrutiny of written work, good progress was evident across Years 9 to 11, and in the sixth form.
- 8.24 The overall quality of learning and behaviour in biology is good. In the lower school, boys pose good questions and give apposite responses, in both genetics and biotechnology lessons. Students in Year 12 display good listening skills, but were passive learners rather than being responsive. In a Year 13 lesson on endocrine and exocrine glands, the very pleasant atmosphere included good repartee between teacher and students. Very good class discipline and behaviour were the norm.
- 8.25 The quality of teaching across all years was good. Teachers display an assured knowledge of the subject and requirements of the various courses. Lessons are carefully

planned, with good use being made of time and resources. Mark books are well maintained, with good ranges of marks and grades. Best practice involved careful colour coding of marks for different activities and assisted pupils to improve their performance. In one lesson, pupils' attention was firmly held with a wide variety of engaging examples from the teacher's Border collie, through pupils' tongue rolling, to physiological and behavioural control of human and reptile temperature. The department has a very good open-door policy on encouraging new teachers to observe all others in the department, and practises team-teaching during examination follow-up lessons and field courses.

- 8.26 The department is well accommodated with four laboratories, an adjacent science ICT room and good technical support rooms. In addition good use is made of the department's substantial greenhouse, pond, and six good display gardens. Within the department there are some memorable displays of flora and fauna, although room exists for more display of pupils' work. The provision of reference books in the biology section of the main library is small, and the departmental library is rather tired. Together they do not adequately support the teaching and learning and are in urgent need of development. The mobile interactive whiteboard, shared with physics, and two mobile data projectors are well used. The technical staff of three provide crucial support. Health and safety matters are well handled, although there has been no fire practice in the science building for over two years. This is to be remedied shortly.
- 8.27 This effective and successful department is well led and managed by the new chair of science faculty. Monitoring and review are continuous processes and well executed.

Chemistry

- 8.28 Pupils' attainment overall in chemistry is good in relation to their abilities. In Year 9, pupils' attainment in lessons is good; they use electrolysis equipment well. In Year 11, pupils also attain well and they gave good quality, perceptive answers on electrolysis through the whole circuit, including the battery, showing good knowledge and understanding. In Year 13, levels of attainment are good; two students were seen working very well on a practical assessment with halogenoalkanes with good experimental skill, and were very assured in discussing molecular structures.
- 8.29 Results at GCSE level over the three year 2000 to 2002 have been generally good. Of the 50 entrants in this period, 48 achieved at least a grade C. This is above the national average for maintained selective schools, although only a third achieved the top grades of A* and A, below that of maintained selective schools and in line with the national average for boys in all maintained schools. The relatively low proportions of A* and A grades is related to the low proportion of able in the year group. AS results have also been good. At A level, results have been very good and well above the national average for all maintained schools, with 45 of the 50 entrant gaining either a grade A or a grade B, and all entries gaining at least a grade E. The department has had a good record in students gaining entry to universities with high entry requirements.
- 8.30 Pupils' progress overall in Chemistry, including that of pupils who receive support for special needs and EAL, is good in relation to their abilities. In lessons, Year 9 boys made rapid progress in an electrolysis experiment with aqueous copper II chloride, and the subsequent discussion of theory. The use of the interactive white board by these Year 9 pupils to establish the ionic formulae of magnesium fluoride and aluminium sulphide was excellent. Two Year 11 international students, with EAL, were well engaged in discussion on the electrolysis of common salt, and there was evidence of good progress

over time in their revision booklets. Scrutiny of pupils' written work showed clear progression over time through all years.

- 8.31 The overall quality of learning and behaviour is good. Very good learning skills were observed in a Year 10 lesson on rates of chemical reaction; the class was deeply involved in the interactive white board demonstrations of gaseous reactions and the decomposition of sugar with sulphuric acid. Pupils displayed good listening and note-taking skills. Overall, very good class behaviour was the norm, with positive relationships between pupils, and with their teachers. In the 5.30 clinics, much good individual working was seen in all year groups.
- 8.32 The quality of teaching across all year groups in chemistry is good. This reflects the very good subject knowledge of all teachers, and the carefully planned and organized theory lessons, demonstrations, and class experiments. Time is used well, and the interactive white boards and other ICT equipment, together with the software that has, in part, been developed in the department, are used very well to enhance the quality of teaching. The use of videos and demonstrations, including electrolysis of molten sodium chloride filmed in the department, and an elegant demonstration of the electrolysis of molten lead bromide added much to the quality of teaching. The valued technician and her two assistants ably support the teachers. The department is well resourced; the adjacent science ICT room is a great asset. In contrast, the very modest chemistry section in the main school library provides little support to pupils' learning. Although well supplemented by the departmental library a significant shortfall in overall provision of books exists. The department has a limited display of pupils' work. However, the very good display, done by Year 9 pupils, of periodic tables in the entrance to the science department is a good example of what can be done.
- 8.33 The department is ably led by the new head of department, building on the work of his predecessor. Many initiatives are planned, such as the proposed Chemistry Club and various competitions in the lower school, alongside the more traditional chemistry prizes in Years 11, 12 and 13.

Physics

- 8.34 Pupil's attainment overall in relation to their ages and abilities in physics is good. The attainment of pupils in each of Years 9, 11 and 13 is good. In some lessons observed, oral responses were very good, and in one particular lesson, pupils with special learning difficulties showed very good knowledge and understanding of the life cycle of a star. Written work was generally in line with pupils' ability, but some untidy and careless written work was seen.
- 8.35 Results in public examinations are good and in line with the national average for selective schools for grades A* to C at GCSE and grades A to E at A level. Of an average of 17 entries, the average over the last two years of those achieving grades A* to C at GCSE was 94%, but only 24% achieved grades A and A*, a figure which is below the national average for selective schools; this reflects the relatively small numbers of the most able pupils in the year group. Results at A level are also good; all entries achieved grades A to E, and 56 % achieved grades A and B; this is above average for all maintained schools.
- 8.36 Pupils, including those who require support for special needs and EAL, make good progress in relation to their ages and abilities. In one Year 11 class, pupils made good progress; they were presented with the prospect of an influx of extra-terrestrial life, and

were directed to discuss a range of different responses. Clear points emerged from each group discussion and, in the plenary session, a plan of action emerged as pupils progressively refined their ideas.

- 8.37 Standards of learning and behaviour in lessons are very good. Pupils are well disciplined and were attentive in all classes observed. They are lively and articulate in asking and answering questions, and good rapport is established with teachers. In some classes observed, however, there were those whose span of concentration was limited.
- 8.38 Teaching was good across all age groups, and teachers showed a thorough knowledge of their subject. Lessons are clearly planned and a range of different techniques and visual aids is used. In one Year 10 lesson, simulations of wave behaviour were projected onto a screen so enabling pupils to see an experiment that is difficult to demonstrate in the school laboratory.
- 8.39 Marking of pupil's work varies in quantity and quality. For some pupils, the pattern of marking was inconsistent, with no marking of some pieces of work. For others, the work was marked, but comments were brief and rarely suggested routes to improvement. In some marking, too little attention was paid to the organization and presentation of pupils' work.
- 8.40 Laboratories are suited, and good provision is made of storage and office space. The department has good technician support, and pupils have access to a wide range of equipment and books within the department. The quantity and range of books in the school library are, however, inadequate to support teaching and learning. ICT provision is excellent and well used by pupils in a dedicated suite of computers within the science department.
- 8.41 The department is ably and enthusiastically led. In addition to informal daily contact between teachers, weekly departmental meetings are held with a written agenda. The departmental handbook is comprehensive and supports the work of the department. Health and safety issues are adequately addressed. Risk assessments are carried out.

Art

- 8.42 From work seen in progress, on display and in folders standards of attainment are sound and often good or very good across Years 9 to 13. Much excellent work was seen in the sixth form. For example there was a full set of strong graded chalk drawings from a Year 12 group and some highly accomplished painting generally in the sixth form.
- 8.43 Results in public examinations have been good. At GCSE, 69 candidates since 2000 have gained 31 A* or A grades. Nine candidates achieved less than grade C over this period, but none in 2002, a year which showed a marked improvement with three-quarters of entries achieving grade A* or A. These results are very good and well above the national average for all maintained schools and close to the average for maintained selective schools. At A level all entries have achieved at least a grade E for the past three years; of 63 candidates over a half achieved grades A or B. These results are good and above the average for all maintained schools nationally. At AS level all have passed and over two thirds of candidates achieved grades A or B.
- 8.44 The progress of pupils, including those who receive support for special needs and EAL, is good and often rapid. Presentation in sketchbooks and folders shows good development over time. Progress improves further in the examination years and is particularly good

- amongst the better sixth-form students. This serves to facilitate progress. At sixth-form level, progress is enhanced by regular life drawing sessions and by the very good stimulus provided by teachers.
- 8.45 The quality of learning is generally good. Year 9 pupils were seen to be thoroughly involved in the process of etching. Pupils respond well to the advice of teachers and act upon it. They enjoy their art and take it seriously. Sketchbooks and work sheets show how pupils react to simple advice on shading, cross hatching, and tone. They readily analyse and annotate work sheets. Pupils are keen to learn and there is an unforced discipline in most lessons that avoids distraction and promotes learning. Pupils are often seen in the art rooms during activities sessions and in their own time.
- 8.46 The quality of teaching across all year groups is good. Sometimes teachers have a tendency to talk at pupils and over-burden them with dialogue during practical sessions but this is partly because teachers make great efforts to be inclusive of those pupils who require support for special needs or EAL. Assessment, marking and reporting conform to school policy and are effectively applied with an emphasis on constructive comment. Homework, in sketchbooks, is set and marked regularly. Sixth-form students are encouraged to be aware of contemporary practice as well as more traditional modes of practice.
- 8.47 The art block built in the 1930s offers little natural light. Space is at a premium and some classes are impeded by being cramped. Some temporary space provided in a nearby squash court is unsuitable since it is too cold and a leaking roof has led to examination work being ruined. Good display is a feature of the department. Resources are good and are used well, they include a new ICT suite that allows for image manipulation and video editing. The department has two digital cameras, a photocopier and four computers for students' use.
- 8.48 The department is well led. All teachers are fairly new in post and have similar specialisms. They tend to team teach and it is not always clear, particularly in the sixth form, who has overall responsibility for each group. The department needs to look at the optimum use of each with, as far as possible, individual areas of responsibility. The departmental handbook contains good and full schemes of work, insight into departmental philosophy and practical information on such things as marking and assessment, homework and extra-curricular activities. Class sizes are unbalanced; some Year 9 classes have eight pupils, others twice as many. One of the largest groups seen included many pupils designated as having special needs. Similarly some sixth-form groups are as small as two students while others are very crowded. Technical support is very good.
- 8.49 Photography is taught separately from art with different staff and rooms. Whilst candidates are entered for art examinations, photography was established some years ago within the design and technology department. It is well taught by an enthusiast for this subject and pupils produce a wide range of innovative and original work that ranges from the rediscovery of Victorian photographic techniques to the latest use of digital technology. Candidates were successfully entered at A and AS level in 2002.

Art History

- 8.50 Standards of achievement are high in relation to ability, with students showing understanding and intellectual curiosity. From essays and notebooks seen and from

- discussions heard, high levels of enquiry and critical awareness are achieved amongst students of a wide ability range.
- 8.51 Results in public examinations at A and AS level are very good. National comparisons cannot be made but these are broadly comparable to the average attainment in similar subjects (such as English and history) in maintained selective schools. Of 83 entries since 2000, almost half have achieved grades A or B. Around a quarter have attained grades D or E but, for some within this ability range, such grades are a great achievement.
- 8.52 Progress of all pupils, including those who have support for special needs and EAL, is rapid with pupils quickly engaging in a subject that is entirely new to them. Lessons are teacher-led but where discussion took place it was lively and informed. The exacting and well-planned course encourages progress. A broad and exacting syllabus demands a rapid pace in lessons and quick movement from topic to topic. AS and A2 examination groups are often very large and this puts some strain on both students and teachers.
- 8.53 The quality of learning and behaviour is good. Students demonstrate a mature, systematic and serious approach to their work. Some of them are relatively slow learners but they are all intellectually curious and the best of them show genuine discernment and careful analysis in making critical judgements. They are enthusiastic yet self critical, confident and sometimes innovative. Students are expected to read and to conduct independent research, which most of them do. Some of the personal projects, for example, were clearly based on original research and showed independent learning.
- 8.54 Teaching across both years is very good. It combines enthusiasm with genuine depth and breadth of subject knowledge and engages pupils, transmits enthusiasm from teacher to student and provides an educational experience of a very high order. Pupils benefit from the specialist teaching and are appreciative of it. Teachers have high expectations of students but always allow for individual interpretation and opinion in class.
- 8.55 History of art occupies two rooms between the history and art departments. The present accommodation is adequate and the department is quite well resourced. ICT is well used. Constructive use is made of the school intranet and good use is made of e-mails between staff and pupils. The department is justifiably proud of its library, which is the largest departmental library in the school and still growing. This facility would greatly benefit from central cataloguing.
- 8.56 Stowe is one of a very few schools to offer the history of art as a subject distinct from either art or history. In 2002 it was the third most popular subject at A level, attracting more candidates than either history or geography and almost as many as all three sciences combined. It seems appropriate that, within this aesthetic environment, visual arts education should include the contemporary but extend to the in-depth study of art and architecture before the Nineteenth Century.
- 8.57 The department is well led with an excellent handbook, which not only sets out the department's philosophy and vision but also explains every detail of practical policy from staff development to health and safety. The department even has a system whereby students can appraise their teachers. The department's involvement in after-school activities and the three foreign visits each year underline the commitment and enthusiasm shown by both students and the two full-time teachers involved.

Economics and Business Studies

- 8.58 These subjects are popular at Stowe and students' attainment is in line with and often good in relation to their abilities. Their understanding of economic and business concepts is sound. Their knowledge is good. The most able students develop skills of analysis and evaluation of evidence, and are able to apply their knowledge with some authority.
- 8.59 Pupils achieve good standards overall in both subject in relation to their abilities. Attainment at A level in economics is good. Over the three years, 2000 to 2002, all students achieved a grade E or above and well over half the 40 entries in economics gained grades A or B. This is above the national average for all maintained schools. Attainment in business studies at A level has also been good in relation to the ability range of the candidates. All 54 entries in the years 200 to 2002 gained at least a grade E, and a little over a quarter achieved grade A or B. These results are in line with the national average for all maintained schools. The disparity between economics and business studies is explained by the markedly different ability profile of the candidates for each subject.
- 8.60 Students study these subjects for only two years, and make rapid progress in that time. Evidence of progress was observed in lessons. Rapid progress is maintained despite teaching groups that are often large and cover the whole ability range of the school.
- 8.61 Students are well motivated and well behaved. They are attentive, relying much upon their teachers for guidance and support. Learning therefore tends to be passive. Students are helped by their teachers to build comprehensive collections of notes that are well kept, thorough and well balanced between material prepared by teachers and that written by the students themselves.
- 8.62 Teaching across both years is good. Students are encouraged to achieve high standards. All lessons observed were well planned and aims were made clear to students. Well-qualified, committed and hard-working teachers taught lessons with enthusiasm. Some lessons were imaginative and stimulating. Involvement in discussion, independent reading and research are encouraged. However, in the lessons observed, some opportunities for more active learning by students were overlooked. Where facilities allow it, teachers are enthusiastic to use ICT applications within their lessons. Appropriate opportunities are given for discussion and for students to seek clarification and guidance. Students did not always make best use of these opportunities. The department makes a distinct effort to make students aware of the skills that contribute to effective learning. Teachers take personal responsibility for students' progress, and lessons tend to be teacher centred. Therefore, further consideration could be given to strategies to vary the teaching approach, offering more encouragement for students to take responsibility for their own learning through group work and research assignments. More thoughtful planning of lessons and of homework assignments could enable the department to develop these active learning skills even more successfully.
- 8.63 The department has an appropriate policy on the setting of 'prep' and on its assessment. Practice is generally in accord with this policy. Marking is always completed. At best, it is characterised by detailed, thorough and helpful comments from teachers. Some marking is more cursory than this. Reports are thoughtful, offering good advice for students and full information for parents.
- 8.64 The department is led very well. The head of department has a clear idea of the educational aims of his department and these are communicated successfully to all teachers. Support for new colleagues in their induction is sensitive and helpful.

Responsibilities are shared amongst staff, with due recognition of their experience and interests. This works well. Further development of the department will require the extension of this collegiate approach to the consideration of teaching strategies and learning objectives in both subjects.

- 8.65 The department is adequately resourced and teaching rooms, located around a departmental office, are bright and airy. Facilities for classroom use of ICT applications are not yet available in all teaching rooms. The department has worked hard to develop subject-specific sites on the school's intranet. Useful material is available for students. The range of subject-specific materials available in the school library is limited, and the departmental library does little to supplement this.
- 8.66 The department should give immediate attention to strategies that will help students to take more active responsibility for their own learning, especially in business studies. An important element of this should be a plan to develop the departmental office into a resource centre, open to all students and teachers.

Geography

- 8.67 Pupils achieve good standards in geography in relation to their abilities. In almost all lessons observed, attainment by the pupils was good in relation to their abilities, and in 50% of lessons attainment was very good. By the end of Year 9 pupils have developed a good range of geographical vocabulary and are using graphical and mapping skills well. Year 11 pupils have developed a good understanding of key concepts and are able to use appropriate geographical vocabulary well. By Year 13, students have a good grasp of geographical terminology and can apply concepts and principles to new situations. In one Year 13 lesson, for example, students impressively related the principles of landslides to the topic of avalanches.
- 8.68 Results in public examinations at GCSE over the three years 200 to 2002 have been above the national average for all maintained schools with 86% of the 201 candidates achieving at least a grade E and 29% grade A or B. In 2002, GCSE results were very good, with 59 of 60 candidates gaining grades A* to C and 31 gaining A* or A. The results in 2002 represent a marked improvement on previous years. At A level, results over the period 200 to 2002 have been good and in line with the national average for all maintained schools, with 35 of the 86 candidates gaining a grade A or B and 83 gaining at least a grade E. An analysis of MidYIS and ALIS data indicates that the majority of pupils perform and progress better than the school average.
- 8.69 Pupils' progress in geography, including those who receive support for special needs and EAL, is good in relation to their abilities at all ages but especially in the sixth form. Well-planned schemes of work allow for sequential development of skills and knowledge throughout all stages. Work for the GCSE examination commences at the start of Year 9 and pupils progress well across all stages.
- 8.70 Pupils across all ages are predominantly responsive in lessons. Most pupils are well motivated, keen to contribute and enjoy debate when the opportunity arises. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, pupils successfully presented arguments to their peers on issues associated with deforestation. The quality of presentation of written work is usually high.

- 8.71 The standard of teaching seen across all ages was predominantly good and often very good. A studious atmosphere is invariably engendered in the classroom. Teachers have an excellent command of the subject and high standards are expected. Many good exercises are set but sometimes a lack of variety of activities occurs within the lesson. The department's strong commitment to the use of ICT to assist learning was shown in a Year 9 lesson where Internet-resourced map and photographic data was superimposed in a study of rural land use, and this resulted in heightened interest and rapid progress in development of skills. The department runs an excellent field-course in North Wales for Year 12 students, but apart from the compulsory GCSE personal enquiry that is conducted in pupils' own time, there is a lack of investigative fieldwork lower down the school.
- 8.72 Formal testing is thorough, with centralised records showing the tracking of pupils through all age groups. Marking of pupils' work is very good; teachers' comments are appropriately supportive and aid pupils' progress. Pupils are encouraged to seek guidance and the teachers provide opportunities outside the classroom for additional support if required.
- 8.73 All the teachers in the department are well qualified, knowledgeable and enthusiastic. They work well as a team and are ably led. The department has a realistic development plan; meetings are held regularly; INSET requirements are well met; and departmental and school policies are adhered to.
- 8.74 The department has four classrooms that are equipped with a full range of audio-visual and other resources including two very effectively used digital projectors. A wealth of visual material is available throughout the department, and this compensates for some otherwise lack-lustre accommodation. The department has a very good and continually evolving intranet site that is being used for some imaginative interactive learning that includes help for GCSE enquiries, case-study revision and links to many useful Internet sites.

Modern Foreign Languages

- 8.75 Modern Foreign languages comprise French, German, and Spanish, all taught from Year 9 to Year 13. Italian and Russian are offered *ab initio* in Years 12 and 13.
- 8.76 Pupils achieve good standards in relation to their abilities in all foreign languages. By the end of both Year 9 pupils' achievement is in line with their abilities, by Year 11 pupils' achieve good standards in relation to their abilities and by the sixth form attainment is good. All foreign language skills are given equal emphasis; pupils' attainment in reading and listening comprehension and oral competence is good for their age and are broadly in line with pupils' ability level in Years 9 to 11, although fluency and accuracy in spoken languages are particular strengths with the most able pupils in Years 12 and 13. Standards of writing are usually good and the best work is excellent, actively pursuing depth and variety.
- 8.77 The department makes a strong contribution to the school's academic success. Results in public examinations at GCSE level in French, Spanish and German are very good and well above the national average for all maintained schools. Of the 297 entries over the period 2000 to 2002, all but 11 gained at least a grade C and 32% achieved grade A* or A. These figures are a little below the average for all maintained selective schools. MidYIS analysis indicates good progress, especially in French and German. The A-level

results in all languages are also good with 95% of the 127 students who took these three subjects over the period 2000 to 2002 gaining at least a grade E and 47% gaining grade A or B, close to the average for all maintained schools. Overall, the results compare well with those of other subjects in the school.

- 8.78 Pupil' overall progress in modern languages is good in relation to their abilities. Rapid progress is made in German, Spanish and French by the more able pupils particularly at A level; also in Russian and Italian where the approach assumes no previous knowledge. The progress of pupils with special needs or who require support for EAL is as good as that of their peers.
- 8.79 The attitude of pupils in class is predominantly positive and co-operative. They are supportive of their teachers and of each other with very rare exceptions. They are receptive to a variety of teaching strategies, and happy to adapt themselves to different teaching styles. They respond well to lessons conducted in the language being taught (the target language), and derive clear benefit from pair- and group-work. Some examples of outstanding independent learning were seen, chiefly in Years 12 and 13, with high levels of motivation, an enterprising approach to research, and pride in the presentation and organization of written work. Senior pupils value the sense of belonging to the department, spending time there outside lessons, benefiting from informal contact with their teachers, and from the resources and frequent drop-in clinics on offer.
- 8.80 The overall quality of teaching across all years is very good. In half of the lessons visited it was very good, with some excellent moments. Teaching in the department is principally in the hands of highly qualified, committed, enthusiastic and experienced specialists who offer a range of styles. Emphasis is clearly on conducting lessons in the target language, and demanding a high level of response. Care and pride are taken in teaching the languages and the context in which they are presented; lessons were carefully planned and conducted with enthusiasm. Teachers know their pupils well. A particularly adult, productive atmosphere was noted in most sixth-form classes, particularly Year 13, where the interchange between teachers and students was plainly a result of long-established, confident trust. The three language assistants each make a positive, distinctive contribution to the department's teaching provision.
- 8.81 The department marking policy is not always adhered to, and this is particularly true where it could be most useful, that is in lower ability sets in Years 9 to 11. A good deal of positive, detailed and constructive comment by teachers appears in some exercise books and files, but it would be helpful if this good practice were more widely employed. The department should consider developing and agreeing a new policy and applying it uniformly so as to support pupils' progress. Written corrections are not currently insisted upon and this should be a requirement in the departmental policy. The modern languages curriculum usefully allows space for sixth-form students to pursue enthusiasms for Italian and Russian. The opportunities for curricular enrichment are wide, and include an imaginative programme of exchanges and visits, AS work experience, and society meetings such as a recent look at a region of Germany and learning about its people and food - even trying original recipes.
- 8.82 The department benefits from a good range of technological aids to learning, with audio and video cassette players, overhead projectors and computer facilities available in every room; these are well used in teaching. Two digital projectors are also well used by the teachers. Plans have been made to develop further independent learning resources within the department.

- 8.83 Many of the displays in the department are interesting and varied, and feature a pleasing amount of pupils' work. The general level of presentation and organisation in classrooms is high.
- 8.84 The department is well led by a new head of department in post since September 2002. The departmental handbook has been updated and a well-considered development plan prepared. The department is building from a position of considerable strength and has an exciting level of potential.

Music

- 8.85 The overall level of attainment of pupils in music is high in relation to their abilities. The school's music scholars and exhibitors, in particular, achieve high standards in both the academic and the practical aspects of the subject. A Year 13 student showed a good understanding of and interest in large-scale Baroque choral writing, and a Year 11 GCSE group displayed proficiency in handling the technical aspects of variation form. A music technology group of two students was absorbed in the very practical work of electronic sequencing. In the majority of lessons observed, pupils had good knowledge and understanding, which they put to constructive use in the exploration of new concepts and ideas.
- 8.86 Results in public examinations at GCSE and A level are very good, and are well above the national average for all maintained schools. Over the period 2000 to 2002, all 16 candidates at GCSE level have gained grades A* to C, with 13 (81%) gaining grades A* or A. This is well above the national average for both all maintained schools and maintained selective schools. Combined numbers sitting A-level music and music technology fluctuate from year to year, with nine in 2000, three in 2001 and six in 2002, all of whom gained at least a grade E, with 60% achieving A or B grades. A-level results are well above the average for all maintained schools.
- 8.87 Progress of pupils, including those who receive support for special needs and EAL, is good both in lessons and over time in relation to pupils' abilities. Knowledge, understanding and skills develop in a steady and systematic way, as a result of teaching that is traditional in style and firmly rooted in clear and well-structured schemes of work. Students enjoy a secure base from which to build their expertise and progress in all aspects of musical theory, history and performance.
- 8.88 At every level of the school pupils show themselves to be competent and well-motivated learners. Almost all concentrate well, and are committed to serious study, being fully engaged with the task in hand. Classes are small and behaviour is excellent, and the good relationships that exist with teachers at all stages of the school clearly enhance the quality of learning, and make for an easy, friendly, supportive and relaxed working environment.
- 8.89 Teaching is generally good and often very good and at times excellent across all age groups, and in all classes observed, both those of an academic and those of a practical nature. Lessons are well prepared, and their pace appropriately matches the ages and abilities of the pupils. Recording of individual achievement is in properly maintained mark books, and reports are written in accordance with instructions laid down by the school. These reports are supportive and helpful to pupils and parents alike, and provide comments that give pupils a basis for improving performance. The three-weekly order system provides further regular updates on attainment and effort, and is used effectively to assess and monitor progress at all stages of a pupil's education.

- 8.90 The resources of the department (for example, books, CDs, scores, collections of music and instruments, a large organ in the chapel, a Feldberg harpsichord in the main school, and a fine Bösendorfer piano in the State Music Room) are good and well used by the teachers and pupils, but the accommodation available for the teaching of the subject is extremely poor. The Roxburgh Hall and the Queen's Temple are both inadequate and essentially inappropriate venues for a practical subject. Their distance apart inevitably means that many lessons start late, and in terms of space, furnishings and fittings each, in its own way, is unsuitable as a place for the day-to-day running of such a large and diverse operation. Consideration should be given to a complete restructuring of teaching, performance and rehearsal spaces in the school.
- 8.91 The department provides a wide variety of musical opportunities for pupils, both within the curriculum and outside it. Many lessons are practically based, giving chances for individual practice and performance and for the development of skills in composition. A rich termly programme of concerts and recitals, includes outside visits (for example for the chapel choir to sing at St Paul's Cathedral), and overseas tours.
- 8.92 Management and leadership are very good, and the head of department leads a well-knit team of highly qualified teachers committed to the development of music in the school. A large and well-qualified team of 13 instrumental teachers supports the work of the department very well. Between them, they teach the full range of keyboard and orchestral instruments, as well as percussion, guitar and voice.

Physical Education

- 8.93 The PE department is responsible for the teaching of general PE in Years 10 and 11 and for teaching GCSE, AS and A2 sports studies and sports science courses. The games department oversees the teaching of all competitive sports and afternoon recreational sporting activities.
- 8.94 Pupils' attainment overall is good in relation to their abilities particularly so by the end of Years 11 and 13. Physical education and games are strengths of the school. Practical work in all aspects of PE and games is high in relation to abilities. Pupils are knowledgeable and verbally articulate about basic skills and tactical understanding of games and sports. In written work, their files are well organised and well presented. They contain an appropriate standard of work to the age and ability of the pupils. A Year 10 GCSE group showed a depth of understanding in their analysis of the high service in badminton. Sixth-form AS students were able to explain very well the biomechanical principles in relation to force and resistance and were able to illustrate their answers with relevant examples from a variety of sports, such as catching a cricket ball and the effect of kicking a rugby ball on the shape of the ball.
- 8.95 Results in public examinations at both GCSE and A level are well above the national average for all maintained schools. At GCSE level in 2002, of the 18 entries 17 (94%) gained at least a grade C and 4 (22%) gained grade A* or A; these results are well above the national average for all maintained schools and in line with those for maintained selective schools. At A level, of the 15 entries, all achieved at least a grade E, and 6 (40%) gained grade A or B. A dinner at the end of each term celebrates the very good sporting achievements of pupils.
- 8.96 All years have opportunities to play games and take part in activities outside curriculum time and their achievements in these are good and often very good. Success in

competitive games is prized and the identification of major sports, such as rugby and hockey, has significantly raised standards, particularly in rugby.

- 8.97 Progress in PE and games across all age groups, including those who require support for special needs, is rapid in relation to their capabilities. This was noted in the Year 10 swimming lesson when support and encouragement given to the less able swimmers completing their 16 lengths for their Bronze Challenge award.
- 8.98 Learning and behaviour are very good. Pupils are keenly motivated and well organised in practical situations. Some lateness was observed in Year 10 and Year 11 lessons, but generally pupils were prompt, appropriately dressed and did not need to be urged to warm up. In games, pupils are highly motivated and pride in representing school was evident from behaviour in matches. Pupils in both PE and games are attentive to instructions and act on critical advice with a keenness to improve. Relationships with all staff are very good. Pupils respond and co-operate well whether it involves putting out apparatus or responding to constructive advice.
- 8.99 Teaching across all the age groups was very good. PE is taught as part of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11. Year 9 have a three-week course in swimming but no general PE and therefore no induction in the basic skills of physical education. From Year 10 the curriculum is tailored to the needs of all abilities and appropriate to the age of the group. Lessons are always well planned using a variety of resources, from watching video clips and videoing players to digital presentations, when a laptop computer was used to highlight on the classroom screen the key points of the lesson.
- 8.100 Teachers have appropriately high expectations of pupils' knowledge and understanding. Discussions of skill analysis by pupils in Year 10 swimming and Year 10 badminton were clear and precise. All pupils take part in games and activities in the afternoons. In games, staff are encouraging and supportive on the touchline and gave helpful coaching points in training games. All staff teaching PE and games are very well qualified and very committed to the progress of all pupils. This was evident in their interest in attainment and attendance at games and activities. In sport studies, the PE department subscribes to the school marking policy and regular testing and marking are undertaken. Written work is marked with corrections and appropriate comments. Marking is generally thorough but marking of the regular tests lacks the inclusion of constructive criticism.
- 8.101 The range of games offered to pupils is extensive. The key sports are rugby, hockey and cricket for boys; hockey, lacrosse, netball and tennis for girls. Other sports and activities are cross country, basketball, football, golf, swimming, weight training, horse riding, beagles and clay pigeon shooting.
- 8.102 The games fields are magnificent and maintained to a very high standard. The new facilities of the glass backed squash courts and the yet-to-be-furnished weights room and PE classroom will with the sports hall and six-lane swimming pool make a very good suited facility. However, the lighting in the sports hall is not bright enough. The all-weather hockey pitch is very well used and there are regular occasions when demand for use exceeds availability. Other facilities include a very well maintained nine-hole golf course and an ageing running track.

- 8.103 Strong leadership in PE and games has led to well-managed departments supported by enthusiastic and committed staff who work very well together as a team. PE and games are a significant feature of school life at Stowe.

Short Subject Reports

Short subject reports contain concise evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning and of provision in the school.

Classics

- 8.104 Three lessons of Latin were observed in Years 9 to 11 and one of classical civilisation in Year 10. Files and exercise books were examined and discussions held with the head of department and the other two teachers.
- 8.105 The teaching was generally good. Lessons were well planned and made use of interesting topic material. They were conducted at a comfortable pace and encouraged pupils to ask questions and consider issues, in sympathy with departmental aims of teaching with enthusiastic conversation to stimulate an enduring love for the classical world.
- 8.106 Pupils were interested in their work, attentive and readily took notes and discussed issues, particularly in classical civilisation.
- 8.107 The department is responsible for teaching Latin and classical civilisations from Years 9 to 13. Greek is taught outside the curriculum. The work is underpinned by a most comprehensive handbook and scheme of work. The syllabus and well-considered future development plans are included in this publication.
- 8.108 The subjects are well supported by modern books and interesting material including video and CD-ROMs. Good use is made of the digital projector in the classics suite of three large well-appointed rooms that also include a library and an office.

Design and Technology

- 8.109 Three lessons were observed and pupils' projects seen in the department. Two lessons of photography were also seen and are commented upon in the art report. Whilst photography candidates are entered for art examinations a member of the DT department teaches the subject.
- 8.110 Teaching is good overall. The style of teaching is purposeful, informative and clear. Enthusiastic teaching engenders a similar response from pupils. Good individual support is given to pupils as required. Few girls were seen in the department but the recent introduction of graphics is a move that hopes to address this.
- 8.111 Space is at a premium and the main workshops are often cramped as storage for materials and pupils' projects is inadequate. The curriculum in Year 9 does not allow for a full year of design and technology.

Drama

- 8.112 Three lessons were observed and discussions were held with staff and pupils.

- 8.113 The teaching of drama at GCSE and A level and the quality of learning are very good. Teaching is well planned to make increasing demands for pupils to practise independent learning.
- 8.114 Pupils work together using their imagination with belief and feeling to create convincing drama as when Year 12 rehearsed *The Love of the Nightingale* and when Year 13 were working on their unscripted presentation. They responded well to the work of others, taking the initiative, starting to think in dramatic terms of space, lighting and gesture.
- 8.115 Drama contributes greatly to the social and moral development of the pupils on and off the timetable. A drama studio and the Roxburgh Hall provide good accommodation. In addition to theatre visits, such as that to Tolkein's *The Hobbit*, well discussed in a Year 11 lesson, and two annual school productions open to all pupils, house plays are performed throughout the year and at the end of the summer term 12 local schools are included in a major production.

History

- 8.116 Three lessons of history were observed in Year 9, Year 10 and Year 13. Pupils' files were examined and discussions held with the head of department.
- 8.117 The teaching is good overall; lessons were very well prepared and a studious atmosphere was engendered. Lessons were invariably conducted at a brisk pace and pupils were encouraged to ask questions. In a Year 13 lesson on the campaign for the enfranchisement of women, the students related this well to previous work before linking with the issues presented in the lesson.
- 8.118 Pupils' learning and behaviour in lessons are good. Some pupils made copious and impressive notes but many had difficulty organising their work, especially with frequently diverse and sometimes confusing source material handouts. Tighter structure and control would be particularly beneficial for lower ability groups. The department is using the school's intranet and this is very useful for some good ICT work with Year 9 pupils. The development of extra-curricular visits, linked to schemes of work, is not strongly developed and would greatly enhance the appeal of the subject. Written work is marked sufficiently regularly.
- 8.119 The subject has a wide range of well-kept books in a resource room for pupils to borrow on an honesty system. The accommodation is functional with a variety of visual stimuli but the inability to control the room temperature when it gets too hot is detrimental to the concentration of the pupils.

Information and Communications Technology (ICT)

- 8.120 Three lessons were observed, one being an AS ICT lesson and the others being lessons where ICT was used to support another area of the curriculum. A discussion was held with the head of department.
- 8.121 Teaching is good; the style was informative and clear. Tasks were explained on well-constructed worksheets and a high standard of individual support was given to pupils as required. In the Year 13 AS lesson observed, students had a mature approach and worked effectively at their own pace. The school's policy of teaching ICT through the wider curriculum was seen working well in a geography lesson, where a Year 9 class used an Internet site to locate an area and to find matching aerial photographs.

- 8.122 Pupils are keen to develop their ICT skills and enjoy the challenges of the work set. They are able to progress at their own rate as was observed, in the Year 9 class, when extension tasks were given to those with more competent ICT skills. ICT is used extensively in coursework. This was seen in a Year 11 ICT lesson where pupils displayed very good skills using a spreadsheet to manipulate data and draw relevant graphs collected from an investigation on burning fuels.
- 8.123 Many subjects make good use of two large computer rooms. These rooms are furnished with sufficient computers for whole-class teaching. An efficient ICT support team is on hand to help with any technical problems. An active working-group is spearheading the use of ICT in subject teaching by developing subject areas on the intranet.

Personal, Social and Health Education

- 8.124 One lesson was observed and meetings were held with the senior master, who is responsible for overseeing the teaching of personal, social and health education (PSHE) throughout the school. A meeting was also held with the senior tutor.
- 8.125 PSHE is taught as a curriculum subject one period a week to all pupils. The programme has been tailored to suit the needs of all pupils and is reviewed regularly. Topics include study skills and self appraisal, approaches to the issue of bullying, alcohol and drugs awareness and sex education. The material is prepared and taught by tutors who, it is reported, are confident in the topic. Talks on alcohol and drugs awareness are given by outside speakers to Year 11 and Year 12. Appropriate use is made of videos and handouts. Teaching takes place in tutors' classrooms in school and PSHE is an integral part of the tutorial system of the school.

Politics

- 8.126 Politics is offered as an option for AS and A-level study in Years 12 and 13. The head of the economics and business studies department manages the subject. Two lessons were seen and discussions held with the head of department.
- 8.127 In the lessons observed, the standard of teaching was good. Teaching was didactic in nature and relied upon a high level of attentiveness from students. Teachers were enthusiastic and lively in their presentation, had a good rapport with students and showed a genuine desire to communicate knowledge and to develop skills.
- 8.128 Students' learning was sound. Where concentration was reliable, students were fully engaged in the lessons, contributed ideas of their own and developed both their knowledge and their analytical skills. Lapses in concentration threatened the learning of some students who, in consequence, were slower to develop confidence in the conceptual and factual material under consideration. In the lessons observed, behaviour in class was always good.
- 8.129 Under the guidance of their teachers, students keep full and helpful notes. While worksheets prepared by their teachers form the core of this, it is fully supplemented by the students' own records of class work and of 'prep' assignments. Written work is regularly set and properly marked and helps the students to improve their performance.
- 8.130 The department has a good stock of textbooks and additional written sources that are easily accessible to students. Teachers use them wisely in the presentation of material and in helping students to further their own learning.

Theology and Philosophy

- 8.131 Three lessons of theology were observed in Years 9 to 11 and one of philosophy in Year 12, students' files and exercise books were examined and discussions held with the head of department and all other teachers of the subject.
- 8.132 The teaching was generally good and in one case excellent; lessons were well organised, and made use of interesting topic matter. They were conducted at a good pace and, although mainly teacher-led, encouraged pupils to ask questions and consider issues. In one lesson in Year 11 on the topic of the current Middle East crisis and the imminent war in Iraq, the teacher encouraged much discussion and thoughtful responses from the pupils who made rapid progress in deepening their understanding of the complex issues involved.
- 8.133 The quality of pupils' learning was good. Pupils were interested in their work, attentive and readily took notes. When opportunities were provided, pupils readily discussed issues.
- 8.134 The department is responsible for teaching theology from Years 9 to 13 and philosophy in the sixth form only. The work is underpinned by comprehensive documentation that includes reference to the school's statement of intent to foster independence and clarity of thought and to extend the barriers of individual knowledge, and a short statement of syllabus aims. The syllabus detailing the work to be covered is complex and could be simplified to make its use more effective. That for Year 9 is confusing and provides two separate courses. The subject has a good selection of modern textbooks in the department although the provision in the school library is limited, especially for those working toward GCSE. The provision of two dedicated classrooms and an office supports the teaching of the two subjects. Displays of posters also enhance the working atmosphere of the classrooms.

Achievement and Quality in Activities

- 8.135 The range and quality of activities are very good. The school attaches considerable importance to extra-curricular activities. Music, drama, sport and art feature strongly, and pupils are provided with numerous opportunities to demonstrate their skills and interests in a wide variety of other fields. They achieve very good standards in each area of activity. The quality of provision makes a very good contribution to the personal development of the pupils.
- 8.136 The programme includes (with seasonal variations): rugby, hockey, netball, lacrosse, swimming, squash, cross-country running, soccer, golf, clay pigeon shooting, riding, basketball, athletics, cricket, tennis and weight-training; jazz band and jazz combo, clarinet quartets, chapel and chamber choirs, string and full orchestras, flute and trumpet groups, saxophone and brass groups; art, creative textiles and workshops; beagles; chess and bridge; photography and creative writing; theatre crew; the Combined Cadet Force (CCF), Duke of Edinburgh Award (DoE) and community service. This list is by no means exhaustive, but exemplifies well the richness and diversity of the provision that is available.
- 8.137 The CCF, DoE and community service are well established and strongly supported; all enjoy a good following, and provide unique opportunities for service and personal development. Music has a high profile in the school and, term by term, offers a varied

programme of concerts (both formal and informal, many of which are given by current and former pupils), recitals, prize competitions and master classes. Facilities for sport are outstanding, and pupils value the wide range of opportunities available, the quality of the coaching received, and the basic accessibility for all of what is on offer. Sport enthusiasts and non-sporting pupils alike are regarded equally in what is a very tolerant and accepting community.

- 8.138 The method used to implement the activities programme relies on it being integral to a pupil's whole-school experience and it is, therefore, largely self-propelled and self-supporting. Because of this it contributes very significantly to the education and achievement of each individual.
- 8.139 The participation of all members of staff in activities of one kind or another is greatly valued, and the records of pupils' involvement are conveyed to parents as part of the termly reporting procedures. The school magazine, *The Stoic*, contains regular accounts of trips, expeditions and exchanges, as well as reports of dramatic productions, concerts and sporting fixtures, the majority of these being written by the students themselves. Examples of creative writing also feature, as do artwork and a considerable body of photographs.
- 8.140 All of the above bears strong witness to the fact that, at Stowe, extra-curricular activity goes hand in hand with mainstream curricular provision, thus enriching and strengthening the pupil's all-round educational experience in a unique and very special way.

9. SUMMARY OF INSPECTION EVIDENCE

- 9.1 The inspection was carried out from Sunday 16 to Thursday 20 March. All subjects of the curriculum were inspected and almost all members of the teaching staff were observed teaching. However, the size of the team did not permit all subjects to be reported on in full. The following subjects do not have full reports in Section 8: classics, DT, drama, history, ICT, politics, PSHE, politics, and theology and philosophy. The inspectors visited 124 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 two chapel services and ten tutor periods. They observed 27 extra-curricular and sporting activities. They held discussions with 51 teaching and non-teaching staff at various levels in the school. They made visits to all the boarding houses and to the sanatorium. They talked with the chair of governors. They analysed the responses of 343 parents to a questionnaire distributed in advance of the inspection. They examined a wide range of documentation made available by the school.

List of Inspectors

Brian P. FitzGerald	Retired HMI, Reporting Inspector
David Beck	Retired, HMC School
Rob Davey	Headmaster, HMC School
Kenneth Durham	Headmaster, HMC School
Colin Edmundson	Assistant Headmaster, HMC School
Sue Feldman	Head of Department, HMC School

Anne Howarth	Retired, GSA School
Charles Lawrence	Retired, HMC School
Roger Payne	Retired, HMC School
David Stockwell	Retired, HMC School
Richard Willan	Head of Department, HMC School