



OFFICE FOR STANDARDS
IN EDUCATION

INSPECTING SUBJECTS AND ASPECTS 11-18

SIXTH FORMS

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INSPECTING SIXTH FORMS

WHAT YOU NEED TO DO

- Give the **sixth form** emphasis **equivalent to that for the 11 to 14 and 14 to 16** stages.

You should evaluate and report as fully as possible the work of the sixth form - the standards achieved overall and in individual subjects; the quality of teaching; the range and quality of the curriculum; and any management issues relating to the sixth form. Schools with sixth forms are allocated additional inspection days.

- Focus on subjects and courses which are in the basic curriculum pre-16, and other specific subjects and courses specified in the inspection contract.

Regard these as you would subjects up to 16 years. Report on the standards achieved, students' attitudes to learning, the quality of teaching, and other factors which have an impact on what is achieved, such as leadership and management.

Include evidence in a subject profile and write a subject report. For subjects which are also taught pre-16, your report of sixth form work will be part of one section on the subject. In your subject reports, distinguish between provision which is part of 'enrichment' studies for all students - for example, religious education or careers education and guidance - and courses leading to A-level, AS or GNVQ accreditation.

- Sample other subjects and courses, including 'enrichment' or 'additional' studies as well as you can.

*Include **vocational courses**, such as GNVQ¹. You can report them under a single heading in the subject part of the report, unless they are already covered in other subjects - for example, GNVQ science, information technology and art and design - or unless particular courses are included in the contract for inspection, in which case, you must report them separately. In sections on vocational courses, you should say which courses are being run and which you sampled.*

- Observe and evaluate work in other institutions which contributes significantly to the educational provision for students in the school being inspected².

The school may be part of a full-scale **post-16 consortium** with one or more other schools or colleges, with a jointly agreed curriculum and timetable, or arrangements may be made for particular courses to be provided in other institutions.

¹ More information about GNVQ courses is included in 'Work-related education', which is part of *Inspecting subjects and aspects 11-18*.

² The 1997 Education Act gives inspectors right of entry to schools other than the one being inspected if they make a significant contribution to the educational provision for some of its students.

REPORTING THE WORK OF THE SIXTH FORM

- Report on the work in the sixth form clearly and fully within the '**aspects of the school**' sections of the report as shown in the table below. Highlight strengths and weaknesses in other sections of the report where the features have an effect on teaching and the standards achieved. Examples in a particular school might be links with the community and businesses or the guidance of students.

Report section	References to sixth form
Main findings and summary of the report	In the tables, summarise the standards achieved and the quality of teaching in the sixth form. Codes to summarise the standards achieved in A-level and AS examinations are included in the PICSi report. Briefly highlight significant strengths or weaknesses.
Characteristics of the school	Include any significant features of the sixth form provision - for example, joint sixth form arrangements, or admission arrangements and their consequence on the attainment of students entering the sixth form.
Attainment and progress	In interpreting performance data on A-level and AS examinations and vocational courses, and evaluating attainment and progress based on observations, ensure that your assessments make clear the standards achieved: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> in the different types of courses offered; at different levels - for example, Intermediate or Advanced in vocational courses; and that variations in success in different subjects or vocational areas are evaluated and exemplified.
Teaching	Distinguish the quality of teaching in the sixth form, and its strengths and weaknesses, from teaching in other parts of the school, particularly where there are significant differences. Be alert to any differences in the quality of teaching in different types of courses - for example, in A-level, AS and vocational courses - considering particularly teachers' knowledge, experience, skills and training for teaching these courses. Draw on evidence in subject sections in Part B and the observation of teaching in other subjects.
Curriculum and assessment	Focus on the range and planning of the curriculum and on the opportunities in the school and through joint sixth form arrangements. Comment on the match of courses with students' aspirations and previous attainment, and judge whether the provision allows them to proceed to further or higher education, training or employment. Evaluate the provision for 'additional studies' or 'enrichment programmes', including religious education, physical education and careers education and guidance, which are over and above students' main accredited courses.
Efficiency	Focus on the strategic planning behind decisions about sixth form provision. Assess the cost-effectiveness of sixth form provision.

- Give a full report of your evaluation of subjects and courses in the '**curriculum areas and subjects**' section of the report.

EVALUATING ATTAINMENT AND PROGRESS

Interpreting data

- Use comparative data in the PICSi report fully to help you interpret results. Compare with the national results, including, where possible, those for similar schools and for boys and girls:

- the average points scores for students taking at least two A-level subjects;
- the average points scores for students taking fewer than two A-level subjects;
- course completion rates;
- pass rates and grade distributions for individual subjects.

As you interpret the results, you should take account of entry policies - for example, whether the school sets a minimum entry qualification for sixth form courses.

In some schools and individual subjects, entry numbers may be very small. In these cases, resist giving too much emphasis to comparisons with national A-level and AS statistics. It is more realistic to compare individual students' results with their results in other subjects and with what they achieved in GCSE.

- Use any value-added measures which the school may have available - for example, those which track how well individual students or year groups have progressed from one set of examinations to the next, usually from GCSE to A level.

These are the best measures of the effectiveness of the sixth form. They indicate whether standards are high enough.

Many schools now have value-added measures and analyse the data carefully. The analyses may take different forms:

- *'internal' analyses, comparing a student, year group or department with others;*
- *comparisons with the national picture; usually identifying how far the actual A-level or AS result varies from the score expected for a student or a year group with the same 'starting point' - for example, GCSE score.*

Many schools use commercial schemes for assessing 'value-added'. Others compare the results of their analyses of results in A-level and AS examinations with national data provided by the DfEE³ in the form of:

- *tables showing, for various different ranges of GCSE points scores, the percentages of candidates achieving different A-level scores;*
- *graphs showing the national picture for candidates with different ranges of GCSE points scores.*

Increasingly, schools are comparing their 'value-added' with national figures.

Schools must not be asked to carry out value-added analyses where these do not already exist.

Using evidence from observations

- Judge the attainment of pupils by 17 or 18 years in relation to the examination or course objectives and requirements. Use your professional experience to judge whether standards are

³ Some schools may have used 'GCSE to GCE A/AS value-added: Briefing for schools and colleges' (DfEE).

as you would expect. Highlight any significant differences in attainment in different subjects or type of course.

- Familiarise yourself with the general features of attainment post-16 in the *Handbook*. Use these and the subject pointers in other parts of *Inspecting subjects and aspects 11-18* to guide your evaluation of attainment, as you observe students in lessons, look at their work and talk with them.
- Where modular A-level and AS syllabuses are used:
 - use the results from early modules to indicate the standard of work of students currently in the sixth form;
 - explore whether the profile of grades on different modules indicates a pattern of strengths and weaknesses in performance (and provision) within a subject department.

Modular A-level and AS syllabuses are now in extensive use in school sixth forms in most subjects. A modest level of re-sitting of module examinations to improve performance should be expected as a natural feature of a modular system, but widespread re-sitting should prompt questions about entry policy and the effectiveness of teaching.

- Ensure that full justice is done to achievements in vocational programmes as well as A-level and AS courses, even though national 'value-added' comparisons involving vocational qualifications are not available.
- Judge the progress which students make through the sixth form, highlighting any differences between:
 - students in Years 12 and 13;
 - subjects, types or level of course.

Use your professional judgement of what is typically expected, and take account of the attainment of the students in GCSE.

EVALUATING PROVISION

Teaching

- Evaluate the quality of teaching, weighing the strengths and weaknesses in relation to the criteria in the *Framework*, and assess **the impact on educational standards**. Highlight any differences between subjects or different types of courses, seeking explanations where you can.

Look carefully at whether, given students' GCSE grades, they are progressing well enough to be on track to achieve the A-level, AS or GNVQ results that you would expect. Use this as a clue to the effectiveness of teaching.

Curriculum

Most sixth forms now provide:

- GCE A-level and usually a few AS courses;

- Advanced GNVQ, often in combination with an A-level or AS subject;

most Advanced students will be taking the full GNVQ, equivalent to two GCE A levels, but in 1998 to 1999 a few schools are piloting a new 'single Advanced GNVQ', equivalent to one A level;

- Intermediate, and possibly Foundation GNVQ courses, usually for one-year sixth form studies;
- a programme of 'additional' or 'enrichment' studies.

Some will offer GNVQ only at Advanced or at Intermediate level. Only a minority of sixth forms now offer only GCE A-level and AS courses. A very small number offer only GNVQs.

- Evaluate the content and planning of the sixth form curriculum with reference to **how appropriate** the provision is and its **effectiveness**.

- Where a sixth form offers only or mainly courses at GCE A level, features to evaluate are whether:

- the range of subjects from which students can choose is broad enough;

about 12 subjects is normally considered a minimum number to provide a suitable range of options;

- timetabling allows students sufficient choice and suitable combinations of subjects;
- any arrangements to teach Year 12 and 13 groups, or A-level and AS groups together, are effective and whether the provision, standards and quality of teaching on such courses are not adversely affected by the economies of timetabling.

- Evaluate the effectiveness of any post-16 consortium arrangements.

Weigh up the benefits - for example, wider curriculum choice or economies, against any disadvantages, such as in travel arrangements or in difficulties in monitoring the progress of individual students.

- Evaluate the quality and range of the curriculum **beyond** that which leads to accreditation in individual subjects or courses.

Provision for 'additional' or 'enrichment' studies varies widely between schools. Normally, it should encompass religious education⁴, sport and recreational activities and careers education and guidance. It may additionally include: A-level or AS general studies; personal, social and health education; information technology, community service, and so on. There should be a rationale for what is provided.

- Take stock of the amount of **non-taught (private study) time** in sixth form students' programmes, and evaluate how effectively this time is used.

⁴ See subject guidance for religious education.

Efficiency

A sixth form may provide a suitable curriculum and be effective, in that standards are at least as high as they should be, but it may still not be cost-effective. Generally, the more options that are provided, the larger the sixth form needs to be if the provision is to be cost-effective.

- Evaluate how efficiently the sixth form provision achieves its objectives⁵.
- To help you to assess the cost-effectiveness, establish the relative costs of the sixth form. Do this by estimating and comparing the income which the school receives in respect of its sixth form students with what is actually devoted to the sixth form.

The focus here is on staffing costs only. Some schools may have done these costings as part of their own evaluation of efficiency or for the planning of sixth form provision. To arrive at the estimates, you need to know:

- *the number of students in each year group;*
 - *the number of teacher periods, hence teaching costs, given to each year group;*
 - *the age-weighted pupil unit (AWPU) for each year group; this is the basis upon which funding is allocated; the AWPU data should be known by the school.*
- If the analysis⁶ indicates that the costs are greater than is warranted by the income which the sixth form generates, so that the pupils at stages 11 to 14 and 14 to 16 are 'subsidising' the sixth form, explore:
 - any consequent impact on the quality of education received by pupils elsewhere in the school, particularly those who are aged 14 to 16;
 - whether the sixth form is being operated efficiently;
 - whether the headteacher and governors are aware of any imbalance and, if so, the rationale for the relevant management decisions and any evaluation of it.
 - If the sixth form is run at low cost, explore whether effectiveness suffers. Costs need to be set alongside what is achieved.

Signs of effective leadership and management are careful planning, monitoring and evaluation of spending on the sixth form in relation to what is achieved.

⁵ For further guidance, see *Effective Sixth Forms* (OFSTED 1996).

⁶ Examples of analyses are included in *Effective Sixth Forms*.

ABOUT THIS BOOKLET

This is one of a set of booklets which make up *Inspecting subjects and aspects 11-18*. The set consists of:

- an introductory booklet, *General guidance*, which is for all inspectors who evaluate the work of secondary age pupils - it is mainly about inspecting subjects;
- separate booklets on inspecting specific subjects and aspects; the contents page of *General guidance* shows the subjects and aspects which have booklets.

The main points in the *General guidance* are summarised in each subject, but if you are inspecting the work of secondary age pupils you should read the introductory booklet so that you are fully in the picture of what you have to do.

The contents of all the booklets are on the Internet and can be accessed from OFSTED's website [<http://www.ofsted.gov.uk>]. This will allow you to obtain guidance for individual subjects or aspects.

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Office for Standards in Education
Alexandra House
33 Kingsway
London
WC2B 6SE

Telephone: 0171 421 6800

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