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The post-16 subject guidance series currently comprises: art and design; business education; classics; design and technology; drama and theatre studies; engineering and manufacturing; English; geography; government and politics; health and social care; history; information and communication technology; law; mathematics; media education; modern foreign languages; music; physical education; religious studies; science; sociology.

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Introduction

This booklet aims to help inspectors and staff in schools and colleges to evaluate standards and quality in government and politics post-16. It complements the *Handbook for Inspecting Secondary Schools* (1999), the supplement *Inspecting School Sixth Forms* (2001) and the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* (2001).

This guidance concentrates on issues specific to government and politics. General guidance is in the *Handbooks*. Use both to get a complete picture of the inspection or evaluation process.

This booklet is concerned with evaluating standards and achievement, teaching and learning, and other factors that affect what is achieved. It outlines how to use students' work and question them, the subject-specific points to look for in lessons, and how to draw evaluations together to form a coherent view of the subject.

Examples are provided of evidence and evaluations from college and school sixth form inspections, with commentaries to give further explanation. These examples are included without any reference to context, and will not necessarily illustrate all of the features that inspectors will need to consider. The booklets in the series show different ways of recording and reporting evidence and findings; they do not prescribe or endorse any particular method or approach.

Inspectors and senior staff in schools and colleges may need to evaluate several subjects and refer to more than one booklet. You can download any of the subject guidance booklets from OFSTED's website www.ofsted.gov.uk.

Our Inspection Helpline team, on 020 7421 6680 for schools and 020 7421 6703 for colleges, will be pleased to respond to your questions. Alternatively, you can email schoolinspection@ofsted.gov.uk or collegeinspection@ofsted.gov.uk.

OFSTED's remit for this sector is the inspection of education for students aged 16–19, other than work-based education. In schools, this is the sixth form provision. In colleges, the 16–19 age-group will not be so clearly identifiable; classes are likely to include older students and, in some cases, they will have a majority of older students. In practice, inspectors and college staff will evaluate the standards and quality in these classes regardless of the age of the students.

This booklet concentrates on General Certificate of Education (GCE) Advanced Subsidiary (AS) and Advanced level (A-level) courses in government and politics for students 16–19. However, the principles illustrated in this guidance can be applied more widely.

Common requirements

All inspectors share the responsibility for determining whether a school or college is effective for all its students, whatever their educational needs or personal circumstances. As part of this responsibility, ensure that you have a good understanding of the key characteristics of the institution and its students. Evaluate the achievement of different groups of students and judge how effectively their needs and aspirations are met and any initiatives or courses aimed specifically at these groups of students. Take account of recruitment patterns, retention rates and attendance patterns for programmes and courses for different groups of students. Consider the individual goals and targets set for students within different groups and the progress they make towards achieving them.

You should be aware of the responsibilities and duties of schools and colleges regarding equal opportunities, in particular those defined in the Sex Discrimination Act 1957, the Race Relations Act 1976 and the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000, and the Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001. These Acts and related codes of practice underpin national policies on inclusion, on raising achievement and on the important role schools and colleges have in fostering better personal, community and race relations, and in addressing and preventing racism.¹

As well as being thoroughly familiar with subject-specific requirements, be alert to the unique contribution that each subject makes to the wider educational development of students. Assess how well the curriculum and teaching in government and politics enable all students to develop key skills, and how successfully the subject contributes to the students' personal, social, health and citizenship education, and to their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. Judge how effectively the subject helps prepare students aged 16–19 for adult life in a culturally and ethnically diverse society.

¹ See Annex *Issues for Inspection arising from the Stephen Lawrence Inquiry (Macpherson Report)* in *Evaluating Educational Inclusion*, OFSTED, 2000, p13.

1 Standards and achievement

1.1 Evaluating standards and achievement

From the previous inspection report, find out what you can about standards and achievement at that time. This will give you a point of comparison with the latest position, but do not forget that there is a trail of performance data, year by year. Analyse and interpret the performance data available for students who have recently completed the course(s). Draw on the school's *Pre-Inspection Context and School Indicator* (PICSi) report or, in the case of a college, the *College Performance Report*. Also analyse the most recent results provided by the school or college and any value-added information available. When numbers are small, exercise caution in making comparisons with national data or, for example, evaluating trends. For further guidance on interpreting performance data and analysing value added, refer to *Inspecting School Sixth Forms*, the *Handbook for Inspecting Colleges* and the *National Summary Data Report for Secondary Schools*.

Where you can, form a view about the standards achieved by different groups of students. For example, there may be data which enable you to compare how male and female students or different ethnic groups are doing, or how well 16–19-year-old students achieve in relation to older students.

Make full use of other information which has a bearing on standards and achievement, including success in completing courses, targets and their achievement, and other measures of success.

You should interpret, in particular:

- trends in results;
- comparisons with other subjects and courses;
- distributions of grades, particularly the occurrence of high grades;
- value-added information;
- the relative performance of male and female students;
- the performance of minorities and different ethnic groups;
- trends in the popularity of courses;
- drop-out or retention rates;
- students' destinations, where data are available.

On the basis of the performance data and other pre-inspection evidence, form hypotheses about the standards achieved, whether they are as high as they should be, and possible explanations. Follow up your hypotheses through observation and analysis of students' work and talking with them. Direct inspection evidence tells you about the standards at which the current students are working, and whether they are being sufficiently stretched to achieve as well as they should. If the current standards are at odds with what the performance data suggest, you must find out why and explain the differences carefully.

As you observe students in lessons, look at their work and talk to them, you should concentrate on the extent to which students:

- understand, synthesise and interpret political information in a variety of forms;
- analyse and evaluate:
 - political institutions, processes and behaviour;
 - political arguments and explanations;
 - the relationships between institutions, processes, behaviour and values, ideologies and concepts;
- identify parallels, connections, similarities and differences between aspects of the political systems studied;
- select and organise relevant material to construct arguments and explanations leading to reasoned conclusions;
- communicate arguments and explanations with relevance, clarity and coherence, using vocabulary appropriate to the study of government and politics.

1.2 Analysis of students' work

The analysis of written work offers a good opportunity to confirm standards and evaluate students' achievement, by investigating the demands made on them and by asking whether their progress over the course has been sufficient. Students' work should demonstrate that they can select and use a form and style of writing appropriate to purpose and organise coherently relevant information using specialist vocabulary where necessary. The text should be legible, with accurate spelling, grammar and punctuation to ensure the meaning is clear.

Example 1: evidence from work of 6 Year 13 A-level students in a school sixth form; all but one started the course with GCSE grades only just above the normal minimum threshold.

This piece of work is a structured essay question based on stimulus material related to the comparative UK/USA government unit. The students were required to review the material which illustrated the scope for decision making faced by Tony Blair and George W Bush and use it to evaluate the contrasting roles of the British prime minister and American president.

All the essays are well presented and of suitable length.

The students have undertaken research beyond the stimulus material presented to them. All but one have quoted relevant extracts from original Internet sources as well as from established texts on the subject.

All but the weakest student relate well the theory of the separation of powers and the constraints imposed on the US chief executive to the position of the UK prime minister in a parliamentary system without a written constitution. One minor weakness in most of the essays is in their estimation of the extent to which the different roles could be adjusted towards an 'ideal' model without undertaking other significant changes to the respective political structures. Only the highest-attaining student shows a good understanding of this issue.

Good use is made of contemporary examples from current events to illustrate the contrasting roles; examples are carefully selected by all students to support their analyses.

The work of the weakest student is at about grade D standard and the work of the highest attaining is grade A. The other four essays are well above the minimum pass standard but fall just short of the highest grade. This looks like very good achievement for these students, given their previous attainment.

[Attainment well above average (2)]

Commentary

The students show a good understanding of some key political concepts. They are able to draw on their understanding of the contrasting positions of heads of government on either side of the Atlantic. They display a good grasp of the essentials of the differences between a parliamentary system and a presidential one, and they apply them to the context set by the question. The attainment of most is well above average but falls short of the highest grade. This is because they made rather simplistic assumptions about an ideal model which could be created from a synthesis of the American and British positions. They do not acknowledge the knock-on effects of the changes to other parts of the respective political systems. Both the attainment in relation to the students' previous attainment and the commitment to extended research are indications of very good achievement.

1.3 Talking with students

Talking with a cross-section of students is a very good way of testing out your developing hypotheses about their attainment and achievement. The questioning should take account of the point the students have reached in the course and, in particular, whether they are taking the AS or A-level award. The following are examples of lines of enquiry you might use.

Questions to test students' knowledge and understanding, such as:

- *What is the difference between the executive and the legislature and why is the difference important?*
- *Why have parties in power been less keen to introduce proportional representation than parties in opposition?*
- *How would you illustrate the essential differences between parties and pressure groups?*

Questions to test students' capacity to evaluate political information such as:

- *What aspects of Cabinet government might be illustrated by the resignation of a Cabinet minister?*
- *How does the current debate about the future of the House of Lords illustrate different views about the nature of democracy?*
- *How might different perspectives on the May Day demonstrations in London in 2000 and 2001 illustrate contrasting views of the legitimacy of pressure groups?*

Questions to test students' understanding of recent work. This is particularly useful when you have already analysed the relevant written work. It is also useful to look at the written work together with the student(s).

Questions to test students' use of political vocabulary:

- *How would you explain the meaning of the separation of powers in the UK?*
- *What is meant by a constitutional monarchy?*
- *What is the difference between devolution and nationalism?*

Example 2: evidence from meeting (February) with AS students in an FE college; their GCSE results were mainly at grade C, but only 2 have previous knowledge of a study of politics.

The students are questioned on aspects of units covered so far (electoral systems, voting behaviour and features of a representative democracy).

Students show sound understanding of certain basic political terminology and concepts, but there are some important omissions (eg, they cannot explain the role of the civil service). They remember taking part in discussions and debates on reforming the electoral system but they find it difficult to give reasons why changes to the electoral system might affect the way parties in government might be held to account. With a little prompting, they can describe the most recent position of all three main parties on electoral reform, but are unaware of the most recent coverage of the Labour government's likely position on a referendum on electoral reform. They can distinguish and give examples of countries with parliamentary and presidential forms of government. They are less sure of the implications of Britain's membership of the European Union on assumptions about our unwritten constitution. Generally, their analytical and evaluative skills are not well developed, even for this stage in the course. For example, they cannot suggest how, although one party is well ahead in the opinion polls, tactical voting might distort the result implied by the headline polls. They have made good use of the Internet, textbooks and case studies when researching their written work, but have had little contact with local politicians or those involved with political activity in their community.

[Attainment average (4)]

Commentary

The students' attainment is no more than average. Although their knowledge and understanding of political terminology and concepts are sound for students on this course, their analytical/evaluative skills are not sufficiently well developed to enable them to apply them to some current political events. They have researched their work well but made too little use of examples available from their local community.

Given the students' current attainment and their General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) results, their achievement over the course as a whole appears satisfactory.

1.4 Lesson observation

Example 3: evidence from a second year GCE A-level lesson in a sixth-form college; an able group, with well above average results in their GCSEs before coming to the college.

A revision lesson on ideas in contemporary British politics.

Students show a good grasp of the differences between the conservatism of the Thatcher era and the post-war pragmatic approach adopted by the Churchill/Macmillan governments. They provide examples from current policy proposals, from legislation of the 1980s and from the 1950s to illustrate the difference. They have some awareness of the cultural changes which were associated with the change in policy and approach, although they confine their

analysis largely to events taking place in the Conservative party. They do not analyse in enough depth how wider changes in society have affected both major parties and how the experience of the Labour government of the 1970s itself contributed to the changes at work in the opposition. They miss opportunities to draw parallels between the Conservative opposition since 1997 and the Labour party in opposition in the 1980s – in terms of ideological centres of gravity. When asked, they give examples of the ways in which particular policies have changed over time but do not fully relate them to the different ideological positions underlying them.

[Attainment above average (3)]

Commentary

The attainment of these students is just above average because of their grasp of the essential features of modern compared with post-war Conservatism. This is shown by their ability to offer examples of policies which have changed over time to reflect the different ideological approach of the party. However, because of their difficulty in relating the changes in the Conservative party to similar changes in the Labour party and to forces at work in society at large, their attainment is graded no higher than above average.

While attainment is above average, this is what could reasonably be expected given their well above average attainment in their GCSEs, indicating satisfactory achievement.

Example 4: evidence from a first year AS-level lesson in a tertiary college (April); a group in which all students have the minimum GCSE threshold scores; some have much higher attainment than this and a few are clearly 'high-fliers'.

Using information gleaned from an Easter visit to Brussels and Strasbourg, students have prepared positions to rehearse in a formal debate on Britain's continued membership of the European Union.

- *Most students have prepared very well for the debate. The positions they were to take had been clearly defined for them.*
- *They make very good use of the excellent first-hand knowledge they have gleaned from the visit and display a heightened awareness of European institutions as bodies which affect their lives and not just as remote 'overseas' institutions.*
- *They have combined their first-hand knowledge with thorough research from relevant academic sources to inform the cases they argue.*
- *There are a few students – in general, those who have only the minimum grades for entry to the A-level course – who miss opportunities to present arguments to illustrate how historical and linguistic constraints within the Union may inhibit the rapid progress towards the more united Europe which their opponents advocate. They have opted instead for a simplistic and idealised notion of a potential united states of Europe and do not demonstrate the depth of understanding which the more capable students have.*
- *Most students perform very well in the debate. Their cases benefit from well-structured argument, detailed research and an underlying enthusiasm derived in part from the experience of the visit at Easter. The indications are that their achievement is good.*

[Attainment well above average (2)]

Commentary

The students' attainment is well above average because they make very good use of their excellent knowledge in their arguments about Britain's role in Europe. The work they have done has been fired with the enthusiasm of having visited recently some of the institutions of the Community. They have been very well prepared for participation in the debate. Because some students, especially those who had lower grades at entry, fail to challenge some of the assumptions made by their opponents, the attainment of the group as a whole falls just short of very high. Given their GCSE results, the group as a whole appears to be achieving well.

Example 5: evidence from Year 13 A-level lesson in a school sixth form; most students obtained above the minimum requirements to take A Level.

A lesson on the politics of Welsh nationalism.

All students understand the broad concept of nationalism as a political movement. They have a superficial understanding of the history of Plaid Cymru and the Welsh language movement. With prompting, they can draw parallels with Scottish nationalism, which they have already studied.

They have a poor understanding of how the history of economic and linguistic dominance of England over Wales could have contributed to the rise of a nationalist movement. They are unable to develop their thoughts much beyond what are, to them, the overwhelming merits of the British parliamentary system. They do not understand why some people might not share their views of the merits of London government. There is little evidence that students have been provided with an opportunity, through class debates or discussion, to challenge established views. Too many responses from students rehearse standard British Constitution textbook commentary in an uncritical fashion. The teacher fails to challenge students to explore some of the prejudices they have rehearsed with little use of evidence or analysis to support them. They have an insecure understanding of the way Welsh devolution has both confirmed and limited the success of the nationalist movement in Wales. They are aware of the historical background of Wales as virtually a one-party country, but fail to make adequate links between the decline of the Labour party in Wales and the rise of nationalism.

[Attainment below average (5)]

Commentary

The students broadly grasp the idea of nationalism in Wales, so their attainment is not judged to be well below average. However, because of their difficulties in relating the historical context of government from London to the cultural and economic issues facing Wales, it is nevertheless below average.

The students' attainment is below what would normally be expected at this stage of a course. This, together with the information about their GCSE scores (above average), suggests that their achievement is poor. This could be confirmed by analysing a sample of their work and talking to them.

2 Teaching and learning

2.1 Evaluating teaching and learning

Interpret the *Handbook* criteria with specific reference to government and politics, and keep in mind the characteristics of effective teaching and learning in which:

- good use of topical issues stimulates students' interest (*subject knowledge, planning, expectations*);
- good whole-class explanations of political concepts and terminology, and questioning of individual students about their methods and conclusions, support individual work on assignments (*subject knowledge, expectations, methodology, assessment*);
- through good use of case studies and stimulus material, such as contemporary and relevant historical events, students develop the ability to apply their learning and to make decisions (*planning, expectations, methodology*);
- learning is enhanced through contacts with the real world of politics (such as meetings with local politicians, visits to political bodies both in Britain and in continental Europe, use of information packs from parties and pressure groups) which provide a contemporary context (*planning, expectations, methodology*);
- students show interest in relevant topical issues, drawn from newspapers and other sources (*students' interest, increase in understanding*).

Be alert to teaching which may have superficially positive features but which lacks rigour, depth, insight and good command of the subject matter. Examples in government and politics might be:

- ensuring that students accumulate information but not that they analyse it adequately (*subject knowledge, methodology, assessment*);
- setting tasks which fail to require students to make connections between different aspects of political systems studied (*subject knowledge, expectations*).

2.2 Lesson observation

Example 6: evidence from a Year 12 AS-level lesson in a school sixth form.

This is an early lesson on political participation and citizenship. Drawing on historical references to the suffragette movement, students are invited to examine the various channels open to women today to pursue gender equality. Students are provided with information to enable them to prepare for a role-play in the second half of the lesson. The male students in the class are required to advocate the case of a woman who has been sent home from work for wearing trousers. The female students role-play the employer defending his decision.

The lesson is particularly well planned but slightly spoilt by poor management of time. The decision to use both historical and contemporary source material works well to allow students to make links between active citizenship today and that of the past. The teacher draws parallels between the use of channels of influence then and now and shows how the opportunities available today reflect the changed political system and assumptions underlying it. The approach is very successful in capturing students' interest and they respond well to the opportunity to ask questions and seek clarification on the issues raised. They are well briefed for the role-play and enter into their respective briefs with enthusiasm. The female students find it difficult to advocate the case of the employer and to understand the prejudice which lies behind it. The male students engage more easily with the role of advocating the case of the female employee. At the end of the role-play, the teacher is a little short of time for a debrief. He does not extract from the lesson all the points which had been intended in the lesson plan to illustrate the issues relating to political participation.

[Teaching and learning good (3)]

Commentary

The lesson is well planned. However, the teacher allows the role-play to eat into the time available for the crucial debrief and discussion of issues at the end, which would have allowed students to reflect on what they have learned. The students enjoy the lesson and participate well. The teaching would be very good if time management were better. Although the students do learn from the exercise, there are more opportunities than are taken for the students to develop their awareness of the issues covered. As a result, learning and hence teaching are good.

Example 7: evidence from a second year GCE A-level lesson in an FE college.

A lesson on the economy in the unit 'Key political issues'.

The lesson is poorly attended. Of the 10 students on the register, only 6 are present. The teacher introduces students to the changing economic policies of post-war governments. He makes a presentation using an OHP on the contrast between Keynesian interventionist policies and the free market privatisation of post-Thatcher Conservatism. The explanation is clear, although a little superficial. No attempt is made to test whether students have been introduced to this topic in other subjects or to check whether at each stage of the presentation all students understand what is being taught. Because the students are so little involved, at this stage it is not clear how much learning is taking place.

Following the presentation, students are divided into two groups to examine newspaper articles on privatisation. This is to illustrate the issues which have been covered in the presentation. They are unclear what they are supposed to do in their groups other than to read the articles. The articles themselves contain economic terms which have not been covered in the presentation. The students are unsure whether they are expected to have a knowledge of these. Because of the lack of clarity in the task, the students benefit very little from this part of the lesson. Moreover, their discussions show that they have not understood as much of the teacher's earlier presentation as he has assumed.

Too little time is left at the end of the lesson to allow the teacher to check what students have learned or to deal with their questions.

[Teaching and learning poor (6)]

Commentary

A number of weaknesses result in little learning taking place: the plan for the second half of the lesson is not well thought through and the teacher makes little use of on-going assessment. The teacher's presentation shows good subject knowledge, but he does not check that students understand his explanations and he does not explore their existing knowledge of the topic. In the group work, the students are not clear what they are expected to do to extend their learning. Without clearer guidance, the task they have been set is not appropriate. There is no effort by the teacher to check that learning is taking place.

Example 8: evidence from a second year GCE A-level lesson in a sixth form college; the group consists of a majority of 16-19 year olds and a minority of adults who are taking the subject during the day, in combination with one other subject in the evening.

A lesson comparing the UK electoral system with that of the USA.

The first part of the lesson consists of a lecture from the teacher on the features of the US electoral system. Students are reminded of the essential features of the UK's electoral system which they have covered in previous lessons.

- *Well-prepared lesson with good recap on students' previous knowledge.*
- *Clear explanations of features of elections applying in the USA.*
- *Good use of video extracts from 2000 US election, to illustrate features of the system.*
- *Teacher does not respond to mature students' awareness of issues in US election of 2000 and fails to allow them to contribute to the lesson.*
- *Some terminology, especially 'primaries' and 'electoral college' are insufficiently explained.*

- Opportunities are missed to draw parallels between the two systems, especially in relation to the first-past-the-post principle; the contrasts are over-emphasised.
- Following the teacher input, the students are given directed reading, which is well chosen to allow them to explore the comparisons and contrasts between the two systems.

My brief discussions with students during the second half of the lesson show that they have all gained from the teacher's lecture, although some expressions and concepts have not been fully understood. The older students have a better understanding of the US system – some of the explanation has been of things they know already, but they have also extended their understanding.

[Teaching and learning satisfactory (4)]

Commentary

This is a lesson with some weaknesses, but these are outweighed by the strengths. The teacher displays a sound subject knowledge and makes good use of stimulus material to support learning. Explanation of concepts is generally clear but some new or difficult terminology is inadequately explained. The mixed group of adults and 16-19 year olds contains a significant variation in students' awareness of recent issues in American politics, but the teacher does not explore the students' previous knowledge in order to consolidate their learning. As a result of the good planning and clarity of much of the explanation, there is significant learning by students – so that the learning and teaching are at least satisfactory. They are no better than this because of the failure to make the most of opportunities to use previous knowledge and to consolidate learning.

2.3 Other evidence on teaching and learning

Lesson observation is usually the most important source of evidence on the quality of teaching and learning, but the analysis of work and discussions with students can also yield valuable information. This is particularly important when the work includes a coursework component undertaken over time. Under these circumstances, the observation of individual lessons may give a very partial picture of the students' learning experience and of the support provided by teachers.

The work analysis will give you a good feel for the overall rate of progress, and therefore the pace of the teaching and learning. It will show the range and depth of the work which the students are required to do. For example, it will indicate whether teaching has used current and recent historical examples to illustrate the subject content. It will also show whether students have been developing their capacity for critical thinking, especially in making links between different theoretical elements of the subject and their application in practice.

Discussions with students will give you a sense of their motivation and the range of their experiences. You can ask questions to show whether they understand clearly how well they are doing and what they must do to improve.

3 Other factors affecting quality

Evaluation of other factors affecting quality, such as the curriculum, management and resources, should always be with regard to their impact on standards, teaching and learning. There may be little of significance to report, but the following is a list of points to look for when inspecting government and politics.

Curriculum and resources

Consider how effectively learning is extended beyond the classroom through visits to political institutions and speakers coming into school or college. Is effective use made of opportunities for enrichment – for example, links with community groups or Millennium Volunteers? How effective is the use of realistic political scenarios, case studies and simulations?

Consider whether the library/learning resource centre contains sufficient modern books, a press cuttings service, and an appropriate range of government and politics periodicals/journals, and what the impact is on students' learning.

Management

Government and politics will normally constitute a minority subject in a school or college, and the management arrangements are likely to be associated with another subject or a group of subjects. Whatever the structure of management, you must focus on its effectiveness. There must be no question of a 'preferred approach'. You might want to check certain points. If there is more than one teacher of the subject, are there effective arrangements to share and develop resources jointly? Are there procedures for the internal verification of the standards of assessed work? Is there a sense of rigour in setting standards for improving the quality of all aspects of subject provision?

Staffing

If any of the government and politics teachers do not have a specialist qualification, keep a sharp eye on whether this affects standards. Do they make efforts to keep up to date – for example, by attending revision conferences organised by national subject organisations?

Accommodation

How well does the accommodation allow for the range of classroom learning activities – for example, role-play and simulation – which the teacher may attempt to manage?

4 Writing the report

The following is an example of a post-16 subject section from a school inspection report. (It does not necessarily reflect the judgements in any or all of the examples given elsewhere in this booklet.) Where the subject is inspected in a college, it is likely that the evaluation will be given within a report on a broader range of humanities courses. The summative judgements in these reports use, for schools, the seven-point scale: *excellent*; *very good*; *good*; *satisfactory*; *unsatisfactory*; *poor*; *very poor*. For colleges there is the five-point scale: *outstanding*; *good*; *satisfactory*; *unsatisfactory*; *very weak*. The summative judgements *excellent/very good* used in school reports correspond to *outstanding* in colleges; *poor/very poor* used in schools correspond to *very weak* in colleges.

Government and politics

Overall, the quality of provision in government and politics is **good**.

Strengths

- Teaching on the new GCE AS and the Year 13 A-level course is good.
- The most recent results in GCE A-level government and politics were above average.
- Students' achievement is good – above the level predicted by their results at entry.
- Effective course management has led to improved standards in the subject.
- Students' learning is enriched by well-managed external visits.

Areas for improvement

- The range of resources to support some of the new options in the new A-level course is limited.
- Students' research skills are not sufficiently developed.
- Opportunities are missed to develop students' key skills through the subject.

In GCE A-level government and politics, the examination results have improved markedly over the last three years. They are now above the national average both for the proportion of students obtaining a pass grade (A – E) and the proportion obtaining higher grades (A or B). The standards reached by current students, as seen in lessons and in their written work, are above average, and their achievement is good. They are performing better than their average results on entry would predict, which confirms the value-added analysis which the school has conducted. The Bengali-speaking students are making good progress due to effective support to extend their command of English as an additional language.

Students develop a good understanding of the central concepts of the subject. They are able to relate these to contemporary events in British and, where relevant, other political systems. They can also make use of appropriate historical cases to support an argument. However, some students by the second year of the course have not developed sufficiently their skills of independent research, which may affect their ability to obtain the highest grades. A high proportion of students last year progressed to university to take politics or related degree courses.

Year 12 students on the new AS course develop an early enthusiasm for the subject. They are well motivated to make good progress. The standard of their work suggests that they are achieving above the level predicted by their GCSEs, but there is insufficient evidence that students are making progress in developing their key skills through the subject, especially that of information technology (IT). The teachers have recognised this; they have recently received IT training and have drawn up plans to incorporate into their work more opportunities for students to develop key skills. Students' files are well organised and provide evidence of an appropriate build-up of knowledge. Their work shows they can make good connections between different elements of the course and utilise relevant examples when necessary. As with the second year students, there is evidence that the independent research skills of AS students are not being developed sufficiently, as they rely too much on well-prepared subject resource material provided by their teachers.

The quality of the teaching on the GCE AS and A-level course is good. The teachers use well their up-to-date subject knowledge, which commands respect from the students. Lessons are well planned, with clear objectives which are

shared effectively with students. Teachers choose carefully their strategies to promote learning. Where group work and role-play are used, the aims have been carefully thought through and are successful in promoting learning. Students are given clear instructions about what is expected of them and only occasionally do teachers allow insufficient time for debriefing at the end of the lesson. External visits are well planned and arranged at an appropriate stage of the course. Where guest speakers are invited, they are well informed by the teachers of what the students already know and what information they would find useful. They enable the students to practise probing questions. Bengali-speaking students are given very good support to improve their use and understanding of technical terms; this helps them to make rapid progress in their command of the English language which enables them to make good progress in the subject. Students attend revision conferences organised by national subject bodies, but occasionally teachers in subsequent lessons do not make full use of the information students have been given. This was shown, for example, in a class immediately following a revision lecture from an eminent psephologist: the class teacher made no reference during a discussion on voting behaviour to the recent trends which students had heard about at the lecture.

In most classes, teachers make good use of question and answer technique to check that students understand what is being taught. Where further explanation is needed, teachers provide it in a way which encourages students to feel able to ask without embarrassment. The teachers have succeeded in creating an ethos of collaboration in lessons, which enhances the willingness of students to participate effectively in, and benefit from, group work. The opportunities to simulate examinations is giving Bengali-speaking students greater confidence and is increasing the speed at which they answer questions. Students appreciate the detailed and helpful comments which teachers make on their marked work. Teachers make a point of discussing with individual students the progress they make and agree targets for the future. Occasionally, targets set are vague and students are unclear about how they should try to attain them.

The quality of leadership and management is good. There has been a concerted effort in recent years to improve the management of the subject and to raise standards. This has resulted in improved attainment by students. An action plan produced as part of the self-assessment process two years ago has now been successfully implemented. At its core has been the setting of standards for staff to implement and the pursuit of distinctive ways in which the teaching of the subject can be organised to capture the imagination of students. The introduction of the new AS/A-level course has been well managed, although for some of the units chosen for the second year there are gaps in resources. The staff work well as a team. They share materials and where one has an expertise in an area of the subject that teacher prepares the teaching material. Where timetables permit, they teach the topic to each other's classes. The classrooms in which the subject is taught are large enough to allow for the range of teaching styles adopted. The walls in the rooms contain up-to-date displays of relevant stimulus material.

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