



**JOHN GRAY HIGH SCHOOL**

**INSPECTION REPORT**

**NOVEMBER 2006**

**LEAD INSPECTOR: MARY BOWERMAN**



**Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate**

*Working in partnership for high quality education for all students*

## **Foreword**

The aim of the Schools' Inspectorate is to contribute to continuous school improvement in the Cayman Islands, through rigorous external evaluations of schools and by providing high quality policy advice and training.

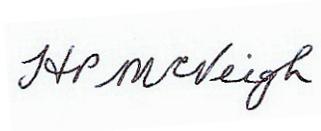
Each school receives an inspection every four to six years. The inspection identifies the school's strengths and the areas that need to be improved. Between inspections, schools are visited regularly by a link inspector to check on the progress that has been made in tackling the priority areas and to support the school in its own self-evaluation.

Inspectors are guided by the criteria in the Cayman Islands Handbook for the Self-Evaluation and Inspection of Schools.

Inspections provide schools, parents and the community, the Education Department and the Ministry of Education, Training, Employment, Youth, Sports and Culture with an external and impartial evaluation of the quality of a school's work and its impact on students' learning and the standards they achieve. Through the publication of inspection reports, inspection contributes to accountability, transparency and openness within the education system.

Self-evaluation by schools is considered to be an important part of the Cayman Islands school evaluation model. Together with inspections, self-evaluation provides a balanced system of internal and external accountability for schools.

The Inspectorate hopes that this inspection will contribute in a positive way to helping John Gray High become a more effective school.

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "HP McVeigh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a light blue rectangular background behind it.

**Helena McVeigh**  
Chief Inspector of Schools

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## **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL AND THE INSPECTION TEAM**

### **THE SCHOOL**

Type of school: Government High School

Age range of students: 13 years – 18 years

Gender of students: Mixed

Number on roll: 975

School address: P.O. Box 1108  
George Town, Grand Cayman

Telephone number: 949-9444

Fax number: 949-6871

Email address: jghs@candw.ky

Name of Principal: Miss Debra McLaughlin

### **THE INSPECTION TEAM**

Lead inspector:	Mary Bowerman	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate
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	Helena McVeigh	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate
	Pachent Smythe	Cayman Islands Schools' Inspectorate
	Jim McVeigh	Local Occasional Inspector
	Sheila Nolan	Overseas inspector
	Sandra Tweddell	Overseas Inspector

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **Information about the school**

John Gray High School, located on Walkers Road in George Town, is the only government high school for students in Years 10, 11 and 12 on Grand Cayman. Its mission is “to promote the full development of all students, preparing them for productive roles in an ever-changing, cosmopolitan society, by providing an enriched learning environment characterized by a diverse curriculum, qualified and committed staff in partnership with parents, employers and the wider community.” The school’s motto is “Hold fast that which is good.”

The school suffered serious damage as a result of Hurricane Ivan in September 2004, and students’ learning was disrupted. Year 10 students (the current Year 12) were taught in the Agape Family Worship Centre from October 2004 until May 2005. Many resources were lost, including valuable materials in the library, mathematics, English, social studies, home economics and technology blocks.

The number of students on the roll increased from 783 at the time of the post-inspection in November 2002, to the present figure of 975, of whom 93 per cent are Caymanian. Currently the school has 42 students whose first language is not English, and there are 14 others who have been assessed as having special educational needs.

At the time of the inspection, the Deputy Principal (curriculum) was ill, and the Head of Data and Communications was filling that post temporarily, leaving the senior management team one person short.

### **Information about the inspection**

The inspection took place from 6<sup>th</sup> to the 9<sup>th</sup> November, 2006, and involved a team of eight inspectors, plus three trainee local occasional inspectors. The following aspects of the school’s work were looked at:

- Standards achieved by students in English, mathematics and science
- The effectiveness of teaching and how well students learn
- The quality of students’ personal development
- Students’ attendance and punctuality
- The quality of the curriculum and how students are assessed
- How well the school is led and managed
- The quality of the support and guidance offered to students, and the level of care for their welfare
- The effectiveness of links with parents and the community

The team also evaluated how well teachers help students to use their literacy, numeracy and information technology skills across all of their school work.

The inspection team gathered evidence in the following ways:

- Eighty-seven lessons, or parts of lessons, were observed, mainly in English, mathematics and science, but also some lessons in art, social studies, geography, history, music, religious education, drama, woodwork, automotive studies, child care, food and nutrition, office procedures and physical education.
- School documents, including teachers' planning, curriculum statements and guidelines, were looked at.
- Students' work was scrutinized.
- Inspectors spoke with students and took their views from the questionnaires into account.
- Inspectors heard students read during lessons.
- Discussions with teachers and other members of staff, including security guards, took place.
- Comments from parents at the meeting before the inspection and from the questionnaires were taken into account.
- Information obtained through the regular link inspector visits was also taken into account.

Inspectors use the following terms when describing the school's work and how well the students are achieving:

- **Excellent / very good** - Good in nearly all respects and exemplary in some significant areas
- **Good** – Good in most respects. Weaknesses are minor and not in significant areas
- **Satisfactory** - Adequate in most areas; no significant weaknesses, but no major strengths
- **Unsatisfactory** – Some significant weaknesses (might be only one or two) that have a negative impact on learning and standards of achievement.

## **INSPECTION FINDINGS**

### **How effective is the school overall and how much progress has it made since the last inspection?**

John Gray High School is well organized and provides a satisfactory education for its students. The majority of students are keen to learn and they are attentive and well-behaved in lessons, especially when they are encouraged to take an active part.

The school has improved in several respects since the last inspection, particularly in the strengthening of the school's leadership and management team, its links with parents and the community, and provision for school lunches. The way that teachers assess students' performance and progress is, though, still a concern, as are the curriculum organization and lack of consistency in the quality of teaching and learning across the school. Examination results have improved, but there are still too few students gaining higher level passes. Overall, standards of achievement are lower than expected.

Senior managers have worked hard to ensure that there is a safe and secure environment in which learning can take place. They have developed policies on classroom observation, homework, marking, literacy and the use of calculators, and have produced a well thought-out school improvement plan. Their focus now needs to be on ensuring that these policies are consistently put into practice, and that each member of staff has a clear and agreed understanding of what needs to be done in order to raise standards of achievement for all students. They will need support to bring about the necessary improvements identified in the plan and those identified in this report.

### **What the school does well**

- **The school is well organized and runs smoothly on a day to day basis**
- **Students are attentive and behave well in lessons**
- **Teaching and learning are effective in many lessons, particularly where students are actively involved**
- **There are good links with parents and the community**

### **What needs to improve**

- **The direction provided by school leaders in order to raise standards of achievement**
- **The proportion of good teaching and effective learning throughout the school**
- **The organization of the curriculum, so that more students can follow examination courses that lead to higher qualifications**
- **The system for tracking and assessing students' progress and how this information is used to meet the needs of all students**

*The school is expected to modify its existing improvement plan or to prepare a supplementary action plan to address the areas for improvement identified above. The amended plan or supplement should be sent to the Education Department and Schools' Inspectorate within 40 working days of receipt of the final report. The school is required to provide parents with an annual update on the progress that is being made in addressing the areas identified as needing to improve.*

## **How high are standards at the school?**

Standards of achievement are improving at John Gray High School, but they are still much lower than expected generally for students of this age.

Students arrive at John Gray with a wide range of prior attainment. Many in all year groups are working well below expected levels, particularly in literacy. Although some students make good progress, too many do not, and they leave with very low qualifications.

This year marks the highest performance of students in external examinations, with 30 per cent of Year 12 achieving at least five higher level passes.<sup>1</sup> However, this is still a low proportion. A key contributing factor is that too many examination entries are for courses that do not give students the opportunity to obtain a high level pass. In Year 12 last year, a significant proportion of the entries were for Entry Level examinations. The standard of these courses is well below the level of CSEC (Caribbean Secondary Education Certificate)<sup>2</sup>, GCSE (General Certificate of Secondary Education) or IGCSE (International General Certificate of Secondary Education), and they do not equip students well for further study or employment. The majority of students following these courses are capable of more demanding material; the standard of their work is limited by the low expectations of the courses. In some cases students rule themselves out of the higher level examination courses because they refuse to complete the coursework requirement.

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<sup>1</sup> Grades 1-3 in CXC ( general /technical) and grades A-C in GCSE / IGCSE

<sup>2</sup> Often referred to as CXC, which is the examinations board offering this examination

## **How effective is the teaching and what impact does it have on students' learning?**

The quality of teaching varies widely at John Gray High School. During the inspection, three-quarters of lessons seen were satisfactory or better and a quarter was unsatisfactory. Whilst there is some very good teaching, there is too much that is unsatisfactory.

Students generally have good attitudes to their learning. In the vast majority of lessons, students behave well and are attentive and cooperative. They are motivated to learn and many can work well independently. Relationships between students are positive and, when they are given the opportunity, they work well together. Good lessons are characterized by mutually respectful relationships between teachers and students. In these lessons, students are comfortable to ask questions of the teacher, which helps their learning.

Teachers have good subject knowledge and many communicate this enthusiastically. Often lessons are presented in a lively manner with good use of humour. Students learn most in lessons that involve a range of activities, good questioning and interesting visual aids. For example, in a science lesson on diffusion, the teacher had planned short stimulating activities. He sprayed an aerosol deodorant into the air, and students observed what happened. The students then went on to observe how ink spreads in water and also the effect of soaking raisins in water.

In many lessons, teachers expect a lot from the most able students and ask them challenging questions to elicit deeper understanding. However, in general, teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are too low. Often the courses that students are following are not well matched to their needs and they become bored if the work is too easy or frustrated if it is too difficult. These lessons are often over-directed by the teacher, rely heavily on textbooks or involve too much copying from the board, with the result that students are not actively engaged in their learning and make too little progress.

There is a lack of consistency in teachers' assessment of students' work. In the best lessons, teachers share the criteria for a good piece of work, often drawing effectively on the examination syllabus, and evaluate students' work accurately. For example, in a religious education lesson, the teacher explained to students exactly why one of their classmate's assignments was displayed on the 'examples of good homework' board. This gave the students a clear idea of what they needed to do to be successful. In the same lesson, during independent work, the teacher assessed students as she walked around the class. Comments such as 'good amount of detail' directed at individuals helped all students to improve their work.

Students' work is not always marked in a way that helps them know what they have achieved and what they need to do to improve. Many teachers too often rely solely on tests to assess what students know, understand and can do.

## **What is the quality of students' personal development?**

Overall, students' personal development is satisfactory, with some areas of strength.

Students' spiritual development is good. Most students are developing appropriate values and beliefs. Many show respect for themselves, and tolerance and respect for the feelings and beliefs of others. They have good opportunities for spiritual development through assemblies, 'Focus' group meetings and tutor groups, and in some religious education lessons. Here they are able to express their thoughts, ideas and concerns, and make connections between different aspects of their learning. Students, particularly those in leadership positions, such as prefects, peer counsellors and tutorial representatives, view themselves positively and demonstrate high self esteem and confidence.

Students' moral development is satisfactory. Students are generally aware of the difference between right and wrong and are very articulate in stating their views about what constitutes good behaviour. Students are helped to develop a sense of morality, through, for example, classroom discussions on AIDS /HIV, and life skills lessons, but there are not enough opportunities for students to explore and develop moral concepts and values across the curriculum. There is a small, but significant, number of students who refuse to adhere to the school's rules and regulations and who give the school a bad name. School leaders are concerned that some parents are not supporting the school in its efforts to teach positive moral values.

Students' social development is good. Most behave well in lessons and in assemblies. Incidents of misbehaviour, intimidation or aggression tend to happen during break and lunch times when students have more time together outside. However, even at this time, the majority behave well and do not get involved. Most treat the surroundings and their classrooms with respect. There is very little litter or graffiti to be seen. The school provides a wide range of activities and clubs before and after school and at lunch time, but the number of students involved in these is relatively small. The students who do participate in these activities show positive leadership skills, social skills and confidence, and a willingness to take on responsibilities.

Students are made aware of the needs of their community and are encouraged to help those in need. For example, last year students raised \$1400 towards the Cancer Society's purchase of a digital mammography machine. This year students raised \$1363 for the release of iguanas into the wild.

Students' cultural development is satisfactory. They are developing a very good understanding and appreciation of Caymanian culture and heritage through music, art, literature, social studies and the annually celebrated Heritage Day at the school. Many students participate well in various cultural activities such as literary, music, dance, drama and speech competitions, particularly during the National Children's Festival of the Arts. The school could do more to celebrate other cultures and take advantage of the multicultural nature of the staff and student population.

## **What is the quality of the curriculum and how effective are the arrangements for assessing students?**

Students generally follow a broad and reasonably balanced curriculum, but there are some concerns about the overuse of low level examinations and with the way that students are assessed.

In Year 10, students all study the same basic range of subjects. The school sees this as a time when students can adjust to their new environment and sample subjects that they have not met before with a view to considering their examination options. Teachers also use Year 10 to assess students' performance so that they can be placed in teaching groups of similar ability. In some cases, for example in mathematics and science, the work covered in Year 10 repeats unnecessarily what students have done before in the middle school, which slows students' progress.

The majority of students come into Year 10 from the George Hicks campus. Many of them have very low levels of literacy and numeracy, and need a lot of extra support. Closer curricular links between the two schools are needed to ensure that staff at both sites are working together to meet the needs of students with differing abilities. This would allow the three years spent at John Gray High School to be used in a more productive way.

In Years 11 and 12, all students follow an appropriate core curriculum, comprising English, mathematics, physical education and life skills. They also study other subjects that they chose at the end of Year 10, which give them the opportunity to follow their individual interests while maintaining some degree of balance in their studies. The options include a range of vocational and practical courses alongside more conventional academic subjects. This breadth of choice goes some way to meeting the needs of students.

The main weakness of the Year 11 and 12 curriculum is the wide variation in the way that different departments make use of the range of examination courses offered. This is due in part to the fact that some students will not comply with requirements such as completing school-based assessments, and therefore cannot be entered for those examinations. The school has offered prep classes and some Saturday classes, and has sought the support of parents, but the fact remains that too many students ultimately follow courses that are really too easy for them and do not give access to the higher level examination grades that are normally required for tertiary education.

The school has well-established procedures for collecting assessment information centrally. Every ten weeks, students' work is evaluated in each of the subjects that they study, and grades are given for achievement, effort and conduct. A valuable feature of the scheme is that it includes a grade for life skills, giving appropriate importance to this valuable part of students' learning. These grades form the basis of the reports that are sent to parents four times each year.

Teachers award grades for achievement that are based on the student's performance within a particular teaching group, and students in different sets can receive the same grade even when their work is of a very different standard. While this is helpful in motivating students, the school needs to ensure that reports not only state what set a student is in, but highlight each student's strengths and weaknesses and set targets for

improvement. The school has instigated a useful pilot scheme in English and mathematics, which provides an evaluation of students' strengths and weaknesses giving a clearer picture of students' progress during their course. From this evaluation, teachers hope to be able to predict students' probable final examination grade.

The school has also made some use of assessment to diagnose students' needs. All students in the current Year 10 were tested before they joined the school, to measure their reading abilities. Staff received training to help them adjust their teaching to the needs of students who find reading difficult, and special programmes were introduced to support these students. However, these strategies are not being used effectively or consistently enough to raise standards.

Not all departments are using assessment information to identify exactly what students are able to do and what they find difficult. Because specific difficulties are not always identified and corrected, students are sometimes judged to be weaker than they really are and given work that is of too low a level for them. This too, may lead to some students not being entered for the correct level of examinations. Students' specific difficulties, such as problems with reading, are sometimes cited as reasons for an overall low level of performance, rather than tackled in order to improve performance. Overall, too little use is made of assessment to identify just what students can do and to use this information to help the students see what they need to do to improve.

### **How well is the school led and managed?**

The school runs smoothly on a day to day basis. There are clear systems in place that provide a secure environment for students. Staff are very visible around the campus, as are several firm but friendly security guards, and support is readily available to students and parents whenever necessary. This has been the main focus of the senior management team. What is lacking is strong leadership in creating and sustaining a culture of high expectations for staff and students.

The management systems have improved since the last inspection. Senior managers work well together. There is frequent communication between them and good mutual support. They have developed systems and structures that enable the school to run smoothly, and they have produced a well thought out school improvement plan which goes some way to "promoting the full development of all students" as expressed in the school's mission statement. There are schedules of meetings to ensure that heads of department and heads of year meet regularly to discuss the work of the school. A pastoral committee has been appointed to oversee the implementation of the discipline policy and to deal with any behavioural issues that arise. Similarly, an academic committee deals with academic policies and practice. Many of the teachers are involved with one or the other of these committees. However, frequent meetings and clear documentation of policies and procedures are not enough to ensure that all staff are focused on the raising of standards. Strong and positive leadership is needed to develop and implement a culture of effective teaching and learning that permeates the entire school community.

Heads of department are responsible for monitoring the teaching and learning in their subject. While this is a positive step towards involving these middle managers more, senior leaders need to provide clearer direction, and possibly, professional development, for departments. At present not all staff have an explicit understanding of what to look

for when monitoring teaching and learning, and there is considerable inconsistency in standards. School leaders do not have a firm grasp of what is happening in each department, and do not ensure, for example, that students are always entered for the correct level of examination in each subject. There are no whole-school targets for improvement by which to hold each teacher accountable for raising standards and by which to evaluate the teaching and learning.

The school will need external support in order to shift their focus from a culture of 'coping with problems' to one of 'overcoming the problems' and working together to ensure maximum progress for each student.

## **How effective are other aspects of the school's work?**

### **The support and guidance offered to students and the level of care for their welfare**

The way that the school cares for its students is satisfactory overall, with some strengths. There are generally secure procedures for ensuring students' welfare, health and safety.

There is an effective system in place for managing and maintaining students' records. Information on joining the school is regularly and frequently updated with both pastoral and academic reports. These records are readily accessible to staff as needed. Confidential information is secure and released to staff on a 'need to know' basis. The learning support unit uses students' records appropriately to monitor, plan and support their progress.

Staff are generally alert and responsive to students' needs and clear as to their responsibilities in identifying signs of neglect or physical and emotional difficulties. The on-site nursing and dentistry service cares well for referred students or those concerned about health problems. There is good provision for counselling and mentoring. Four years ago the school introduced a useful mentoring programme for students who need additional support. The students are supported by a teacher and member of the business community for about 15 months. In addition, last year all Year 12 students were mentored by members of staff. This is a very positive initiative to help students in their final school year.

These services, together with that of the visiting psychologist, are having a positive impact on the development of the students. Despite these good opportunities, some students, particularly in Year 11, indicated that they are still unsure of who to turn to if distressed.

A satisfactory careers programme within life skills provides younger students with useful option choices at the end of Year 10. A sustained work experience scheme for Year 11 provides students with useful opportunities to experience a range of career options. Volunteers from the wider community offer help with mentoring older students and by Year 12, students are well informed about further study opportunities available on the island and overseas. Students from Year 12 reported a high likelihood that the majority of their peers would continue on to further education.

The school has a clearly defined discipline policy that has assisted to some extent in reducing behavioural problems. However, although merits and rewards for good work, behaviour and attendance are presented to students, the policy focuses more on sanctions, such as detentions and the use of the withdrawal room. Some students are concerned about the crowding that has to take place under shelters on the walkways during rainy weather, as this sometimes leads to behavioural problems. A relatively small proportion of students take part in regular clubs, but those not involved with clubs need a range of purposeful activities that they can be involved in before school and at lunch time.

Students are well supported and protected from harm. Staff are regularly on duty throughout the site during lessons as well as before school, at break and lunch times. The security guards are very successful in supporting students' behaviour and personal development. Despite these efforts, however, some students report an undercurrent of intimidation and racism among some groups that is not addressed by the school.

The school maintains good links with external agencies such as the police and the *Youth to Youth* programme, so that students are well informed on drug abuse and sex education.

Students' attendance and punctuality are monitored well. While the school's records for the current academic year show that attendance has improved, attendance information for Years 11 and 12 indicates that 15 per cent of students do not attend regularly. Deputy heads of year commented that they considered that the single most important cause for non-attendance was the unsatisfactory match of the curriculum to the needs of a significant number of students. Unauthorized absence remains high. However, the true picture of truancy is unclear as unexplained absences remain classified as unauthorised until parental notes are received and such notes are often slow in arriving.

The overwhelming majority of students arrive on time for school. Indeed, many are on site as much as an hour and a half ahead of the start of lessons because school buses arrive so early. Some students are falling asleep in class because of the long school days they experience. Few students are late to lessons, which is very positive given the extensive campus.

### **Links with parents and the community**

The school has developed good links with parents and the wider community. Parents receive regular updates on their children's progress through four reports each year. They also have a good opportunity to follow up each of these reports with teachers at parent consultation evenings.

The school works hard to maintain contact with parents. Heads of year and the pastoral administrator often contact individual parents directly to pre-empt problems. For example, when discipline issues arise or potential honours students are underperforming, parents are informed at an early stage in an attempt to halt the decline. Parents are given contact details for several key teaching personnel, notably heads of year, so that they can make contact quickly when necessary.

Parents have good access to the school. One head of year regularly organises meetings between specific parents and teachers, which helps cement good relationships between

the school and home. Informal links are also strong as senior teachers are very accessible and they are ready to listen to any problems linked to the school.

Heads of year often organize information meetings for parents and, in the past, district meetings have been held to try to make access to the school easier for parents. Termly newsletters are a good source of general information and current affairs for parents. They are well supported by an increasingly important communication vehicle: the school website, which is developing into an attractive and easy to use information source for parents. It is now possible for parents to leave messages for some teachers on their personal web pages. When fully developed it will be an effective communication channel between the school and parents.

Although an attendance register is not kept, the school considers the turn-out of parents at the various meetings to be disappointing. As a consequence, the school is making strenuous and creative efforts to encourage fuller parental participation. Besides telephoning specific parents, radio announcements, notices in banks and church bulletins and word of mouth are used to advertise more widely.

The home-school association (HSA) provides a good opportunity for parents to become more closely involved with the school. A sub-committee has developed a set of guidelines for bus wardens in order to improve the journey into school. The guidelines have been submitted to the Education Department for consideration. The recently appointed president of the HSA is enthusiastic about her role and has several good ideas to improve the response of the parent body to the work of the school. For example, to improve the way the school canvasses the views of parents, she is proposing to use HSA meetings as a forum for parents to raise concerns which can be followed up with the school.

## **What is the quality of teaching and learning in English, mathematics, science and ICT across the curriculum?**

### **English**

Provision in English is satisfactory with some good features.

The English department has been effective in raising standards and ensuring that all students receive some qualification before they leave. Standards have risen gradually over the past five years. The challenge for the department now is to raise standards for the students who do not seem likely to achieve high passes in the General CXC.

Information from tests shows that students enter the school with below average levels of literacy and boys' skills are particularly poor. Many students make good progress and last year about half gained a higher level pass, which is close to the average pass rate for all countries. More able students are generally taught well and many, particularly girls, read fluently and with expression, argue their case, supporting their point of view with reference to the text and write in a well structured way. The department enters students for a number of writing competitions and has been very successful in gaining awards. Average ability students achieve well, although more of them could be pushed to do better, especially by taking the literature examination.

Teachers of students in the lower sets work with the aim of ensuring an Entry Level pass for each student. However, as the department notes in its self-evaluation, the examination syllabus dominates the teaching, and students are taught the mechanics rather than the joy of writing. The work is frequently too easy or repetitive so they are insufficiently challenged, become bored and do not make the progress they should.

Boys make up some ground but they generally do not do as well as the girls and their standards of literacy remain weak. Many students are confident and articulate speakers and thrive in classrooms where they are encouraged to discuss their ideas. In many lessons, though, the teacher talks for much of the time and students are not expected to give more than brief answers.

The behaviour of students in lessons is good and many work hard. A strength across the department is the ethos in each classroom. Relationships between staff and students are very good and have a positive impact upon students' motivation and desire to learn. When students are given the opportunity, they work well in groups, developing their ideas and their language skills. In some lessons, students are given little opportunity to develop skills of independence as the teacher does all the work. Students respond well to the good opportunities for their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through the study and discussion of literature. Teachers have carefully selected texts to reflect the local culture and to give an insight into the culture and beliefs of others.

The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall, with good features. Teaching is generally better in the higher sets than the lower because of the way Entry Level is taught. Across the department, teachers have a good understanding of the subject and use this well to cover the requirements of the syllabus. In the best lessons, teachers use a variety of methods and activities that maintain students' motivation. Conversely, many

lessons use only one approach, so students often lose concentration and interest. Nearly all teachers use techniques to support students' writing, such as brain-storming and handouts for students to follow. In effective lessons, teachers use questions to probe understanding and encourage students to read closely and with deeper understanding. In one lesson, the teacher's rapid questions led to almost all students developing very good understanding of the features of short stories and some students showed very good skills of critical analysis. Standards in this class were high, yet many students will not be taking the literature paper.

There are three aspects of teaching and learning that need to be improved. The first is lesson objectives: most teachers set them, but rarely share them with students, who are not always aware of what they are expected to learn. Also many objectives are simply tasks for students to do, rather than expectations for their learning. The second area is the match of work to the ability of the students. Although students are taught in sets, these still include a wide range of ability. All students are generally given the same work, regardless of their capability, so the most able switch off and the least able struggle. One to one support is effective but the department needs to review its strategies for dealing with the most and least able in each set. The third area to develop, which the department has recognized in its self-evaluation, is how teachers mark students' work. The best marking suggests how the work may be improved. The least effective uses ticks and a grade with no guidance as to how the student can improve the work.

A strength in the department is the portfolio of work that sometimes has pieces from the feeder schools. The department has recognised correctly that these could be used more effectively by teachers and students.

The scheme of work is a well-considered document that is used for planning. The main issue for the curriculum is what course to offer for students who do not take the General CXC examination. Some able students are entered for the Entry Level examination because of their reluctance to write at the expected standard in the General and literature papers. Currently, these students are double entered for Entry Level and General to ensure they leave with some accreditation. About 40 per cent are entered for literature and more than half of these achieve a good pass. However, many more are capable of achieving success in this paper. Tackling the problem of the dislike of writing by making it pleasurable is a matter of urgency.

The department is well led and has satisfactory management systems. Teachers aim to ensure that every student leaves with some form of accreditation and all teachers work hard to meet this aim. The self-evaluation by the department is accurate. For the last two years, an analysis has been made of students' performance in the tests and the information from this has been used to plan lessons. Staff have also used the information to predict how well students should do and reviewed their predictions at the end of the year; this is good practice. The head of department monitors teachers when possible but it is a large department, so additional ways need to be sought, such as involving other staff and developing a system of peer observation. Teachers welcome the support of the head of department and speak of a cohesive and supportive team.

## **Literacy across the curriculum**

Many students have weak literacy skills that prevent them from fully accessing the curriculum. The school has recognised this as an area of concern and has set up a group to tackle it. There have been some useful discussions with staff from the George Hicks campus about literacy standards expected of students who start at John Gray. There has also been some in-service training on literacy. Regular meetings are held about literacy, but not all departments have sent representatives. Other useful initiatives include a book of the month for students and staff with meetings to discuss the book. Vocabulary for the day is introduced during tutorials. Teachers from the literacy group have made staff aware that they can offer guidance. The initiative is well led. It is too soon to judge its impact on standards, but to be fully effective, every teacher in the school needs to take responsibility for teaching the specific skills of reading and writing for their subjects.

## **Mathematics**

Provision for mathematics is satisfactory.

Standards of achievement in mathematics are below average overall, although some students do well. Results in external examinations at the end of Year 12 are lower than those expected internationally for the age group. The most able students, around a third of each year group, achieve well in the IGCSE and CXC examinations. Students in middle and lower groups, however, achieve less well than they should, mainly because the expectations of them are too low and the courses they follow are too undemanding.

Students begin Year 10 with below-average skills in most areas of mathematics. Nevertheless, many show a good grasp of simple statistical work, particularly pictorial representation. They are comfortable with angle facts and simple calculations. Able students can apply arithmetical processes to word problems, often coping with complex calculations. Many students, however, experience difficulties with higher order numerical skills and in their application to manipulative algebra. They rely too heavily on half-remembered rules and often fail to spot patterns and links within topics. Students' enthusiasm for new courses is often quickly lost because they spend too much time repeating work covered in earlier years. In a Year 10 statistics lesson, for example, students spent far too long interpreting simple pictograms and gained little new knowledge.

Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall, but range from good to inadequate. Teaching is strongest in top sets where students learn well. Teachers' subject expertise and enthusiasm for mathematics underpins the above-average standards these students achieve. Well structured materials ensure students know what is expected of them. A Year 10 group, for example, coped well with constructing triangles because of clear modelling of the task by the teacher.

The way teachers plan and organize work has an important impact on how well students learn mathematics. Teachers plan conscientiously for content but often pay too little attention to activities and practical resources that help students, particularly in middle and lower groups, grow in understanding. As a result, some lessons fail to address students' needs. In a lesson on fractions in Year 11, for example, students who were

struggling to understand the concept of equivalent fractions would have benefited from having practical equipment to help them visualise the ideas.

Working relationships between students and teachers are good and have a major positive impact on learning. Students at all levels have confidence in their teachers and feel comfortable to reflect on their progress in lessons and admit if they need help or support. The teachers give generously of their time to help individual students both within and outside of lessons. The negative side of this is that many students rely too heavily on teachers and some do not take enough responsibility for their own learning, and fail to complete homework, for example.

Students behave very well in lessons and most want to learn. They settle quickly to work, co-operate with teachers and each other, and participate well in oral and written activities. Many take care in the presentation of work, although too few set out the processes by which they reach solutions.

The leadership and management of mathematics are good. The head of department recognizes the current strengths of the department, such as the good team work and sound subject knowledge of teachers, as well as the weaknesses. There is an appropriate focus on reviewing the issues caused by the current choice of examinations that prevents many students gaining good qualifications. A programme of monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning is underway and plans are in hand to develop target setting for students. The curricular links with the George Hicks campus need to be strengthened and schemes of work dovetailed. Most other issues from the last inspection have been addressed satisfactorily.

### **Numeracy across the curriculum**

The school has the beginnings of a policy for developing students' numeracy skills across all subjects. However, there is currently little planned use of mathematics across the curriculum. Some subject areas do enhance mathematical skills very effectively. In an art lesson for Year 12, for example, circle properties and ratio were well used. A Year 10 science group used their mathematics skills to solve problems involving formulae for velocity, distance and time. Other science students, however, struggled to use calculators efficiently when finding molecular weights. Currently, there is guidance to departments on using calculators, but more is needed to help develop consistent approaches to other aspects of numeracy, such as graphical tasks and use of formulae.

### **Science**

Overall, the provision for science is satisfactory.

When students start in Year 10, the standard of their work is generally below average. By the end of Year 12, very able students achieve as might be expected, but others do not do so well. For the majority, their progress is too slow. They have too few opportunities to develop higher order thinking skills, including the investigational skills of science, such as designing and evaluating experiments.

Students have good attitudes to their studies. They are generally attentive and behave well in lessons and they complete their written assignments neatly.

Overall, teaching is satisfactory. Teachers know their subject well, are clear about examination assessment criteria and respond accurately to any questions put to them. They have developed good relationships with their students that help to maintain a good working atmosphere in the classroom. A substantial range of material to support students' learning has been produced. The materials include well presented booklets of concise notes and work sheets for graph work and short answers. In addition, teachers are developing a web site that will soon provide a comprehensive science resource for students to visit.

Although teachers plan their work carefully, they focus too much on the information that has to be taught and too little on the activities that students should be engaged in to promote their learning. Lessons often start slowly and have no well-structured ending, such as a review of the learning that has taken place. Teachers' expectations of what students can do are usually too low. They do not give students enough opportunities to think for themselves or express their own ideas, and the challenge and pace of lessons are too slow. Too often, this leads to dull lessons, particularly when there are not enough activities that appeal to students' different learning styles.

Teachers mark students' work regularly with ticks and marks out of ten. However, this does not tell students clearly enough what they need to do to improve.

The accommodation for science is poor. Few rooms have good enough facilities for students to engage in a wide range of activities, although teachers do try to incorporate some practical work into their lessons. The department is well supported by a science technician who works hard and creatively to meet the needs of teachers in difficult circumstances and cramped preparation areas. Also, science rooms are not exciting places to enter. Teachers could do more to improve the environment and make it more stimulating for students, with, for example, students' work that illustrates expected standards and celebrates their efforts and achievements.

The department offers a wide choice of courses and provides the appropriate specialist teachers for each one. However, the lowest-attaining students can only choose a course that does not result in a GCSE grade, which is not appropriate for all of them. In addition, the curriculum is too narrow for those students who opt for a single separate science, such as biology, and their options for further study in a scientific field are limited. In Year 10, the department does not build on the previous work that students have done in earlier years, which slows the progress of many for whom the course is too repetitive.

Teachers regularly assess students' work, but they do not do so against a common standard. Therefore, students do not know how well they are doing compared to the expected level, for their age. Teachers do not make enough use of assessment information in planning their lessons or in setting targets for students. The wide range of courses makes it difficult for the department to assess how well it is doing compared to other departments in the school. It also restricts the movement of students between ability sets and makes it hard to compare the relative performance of teachers and students. The department is beginning to analyse the external examination results, which is a good step, but this has not yet had an impact on the department's performance.

The department is managed satisfactorily. Teachers have the appropriate syllabuses and work schemes and they all follow the guidelines in the department's procedural

booklet so that the department runs smoothly. They work well as a team and cope cheerfully with the sprawling site and the limited science facilities.

The science team has not developed a shared view of what an effective lesson looks like, or of how students learn, in order to promote students' progress most effectively. Although some monitoring of teaching is carried out, it is not focussed clearly enough on raising standards and there is not enough evaluation of the department's performance to pinpoint where changes might have the most effect.

### **ICT across the curriculum**

Progress in this area was severely restricted by the devastation to the facilities and equipment caused by Hurricane Ivan in 2004.

The school is very well equipped with computers and other hardware and some departments have recently acquired a set of laptops which they can use with a class.

Good use is made of display technology in lessons in a wide range of subjects. For example, in art lessons good use is made of image projection and zooming to support the teachers' explanations. In English, the teachers draw upon websites to support their teaching and in science, teachers use PowerPoint presentations effectively. Other subjects use video clips and DVDs. This variety of media and high quality presentations motivate students and help to make teachers' explanations clear, so supporting students' progress.

Less well developed is students' use of ICT to support their learning in different subjects and students rarely use computers outside of ICT lessons. An exception to this was a literacy support lesson in which students used computers to help them with their spelling. In some subjects, students prepare PowerPoint presentations, but little use is made of subject-specific software or the Internet for students to carry out their own research.

There is an audit of teachers' skills currently underway. This could be a good basis from which to start increasing teachers' understanding of how ICT can enhance the teaching and learning of their own subject areas.

## Appendix

### Recommendations for the school

The following lists are suggested ways in which the school could try to overcome the weaknesses identified as 'what needs to improve' in the summary on page 7 of this report. They are not intended to be mandatory.

**1. In order to improve standards of achievement, the school should consider:**

- Having a policy on examination entries to reduce the current inconsistencies between subjects
- Monitoring the courses that individual students follow, so as to avoid inconsistencies - for example a student entering CXC English but Entry Level history
- Expecting students to follow courses at the highest level of their potential

**2. In order to improve the proportion of good teaching and effective learning, the school should consider:**

- Developing an agreed understanding of the features of a good lesson
- Developing a teaching and learning policy (as stated in the School Improvement Plan)
- Engaging in professional development on active teaching methods
- Sharing the good practice currently existing in the school
- Developing a common approach to planning
- More rigorous monitoring and evaluation of classroom practices

**3. In order to improve the organization of the curriculum so that more students can follow examination courses leading to higher level qualifications, the school should consider:**

- Using teaching time in Year 10 to present new and exciting work to students. This could include making a start on examination courses, which would involve students making option choices before starting Year 10 or early in the year.
- Reviewing the option choices available to students so that they have access to the range of courses that they are likely to find most useful in seeking employment or moving into the next stage of education. This could include vocational courses in leisure and tourism, for example

**4. In order to improve the system for tracking and assessing students' progress and using the information to meet the needs of all students, the school should consider:**

- Extending, as soon as practicable, the pilot assessment scheme now taking place in English and mathematics, in order to provide management information about the progress made by students and the relative performance of different departments
- Increasing the rigour of the assessment systems and replacing the use of percentage scores with criterion - based assessment. This would allow students' performance to be analysed in order to plan the next stage of their learning

## **Recommendations for English**

### **Raise expectations of what students can do by:**

- Establishing a strong departmental ethos at the start of Year 10 that makes English an exciting subject
- Reviewing the curriculum for English to ensure that it gives every student the best possible chance of success
- Tackling the perception that students will not write so that more students are entered for the General paper and many more are entered for the Literature examination

### **Continue to raise standards of literacy, particularly for boys, by:**

- Working with senior managers to ensure that each department in the school takes responsibility for literacy in their subjects
- Ensuring that tasks motivate boys, especially in the middle and lower sets

### **Raise the quality of teaching and learning by;**

- Ensuring that work challenges the most able and motivates the least able
- Continue using the data from assessment to monitor the progress that students are making towards their predicted grades and stepping in if students start to fall behind
- Telling students what they are expected to learn in lessons so that they start to take responsibility for their learning
- Improving marking by focusing on the quality of the work, not only the surface features of grammar and spelling, but suggesting how the work can be improved
- Involving students more frequently in discussion through pair and group work

### **Improve the quality of monitoring and evaluation by:**

- Involving more teachers in reviewing the work of the department
- Increasing the amount of peer observation so that all can learn from each other

## **Recommendations for mathematics**

### **Raise standards of achievement by:**

- Considering possible alternative GCSE courses for those who find the IGCSE/CXC very challenging
- Ensure that expectations of middle and lower attaining groups are high enough
- Reviewing the mathematics curriculum links with the George Hicks campus
- Continue with plans to develop numeracy across the curriculum
- Taking forward plans to develop assessment practice, including target setting and consistency of departmental marking and recording
- Exploring possible models of tracking progress across the curriculum from a secure base line so that students' progress can be clearly evidenced
- Further developing the monitoring and evaluation of the department and using the findings to build professional development activities

## **Recommendations for science**

### **Improve the teaching and learning in science by:**

- Agreeing a science lesson structure that reflects the way students learn (such as a three-part lesson: starter – engage brain immediately, share the big picture, make the topic relevant and important; main body – variety of activities to make sense of new ideas, apply them to new situations; plenary – review what has been learned)
- Developing a range of lesson activities that appeal to students' different learning styles (visual, audio and kinaesthetic)
- Introducing more opportunities for students to develop their skills in scientific investigations
- Developing an assessment scheme that measures students' progress against objective standards (criterion referenced assessment)
- Reviewing the range of courses to ensure that students have a balanced science curriculum and are entered for the most appropriate level of examination

## **Recommendations for ICT across the curriculum**

### **Improve ICT across the curriculum by:**

- Arranging for subject-specific training on the use of ICT to enhance teaching and learning
- Ensuring that departments plan for the use of ICT in their schemes of work, and monitoring the extent to which it is used
- Investing in more subject-specific software
- Involving the ICT department in supporting the planning of ICT in other subjects to ensure consistency in expectation of students' ICT skills, and enable other subject areas to support the delivery of the ICT curriculum