

INSPECTION REPORT

**MAIDSTONE GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR
GIRLS**

Maidstone

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118836

Headteacher: Mrs K J Judson

Reporting inspector: Mrs S D Morgan
1355

Dates of inspection: 6th March-10th March 2000

Inspection number: 185238

Inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar (selective)
School category:	Voluntary Controlled
Age range of pupils:	11- 18
Gender of pupils:	Girls
School address:	Buckland Road Maidstone Kent
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr R Porter
Date of previous inspection:	November 1994

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mrs S D Morgan	Registered inspector	-	What sort of school is it?
			How high are standards?
			How well are pupils taught?
			What should the school do to improve further?
Mrs E Dickson	Lay inspector	-	How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Mrs S McConville	Team inspector	English	-
		English as an additional language	
Mr P Metcalf	Team inspector	Mathematics	-
		Equality of opportunity	
Ms P Fyans	Team inspector	Science	-
Ms R Allison-Smith	Team inspector	Art	-
Mr V Harrison	Team inspector	Design and technology	-
Mr S Jordan	Team inspector	Geography	How well is the school led and managed?
		History	
Mr D Gutmann	Team inspector	Information technology	
Mr T O'Sullivan	Team inspector	Modern Foreign Languages	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
Sir Lyndon Jones	Team inspector	Music	-
		Special educational needs	
Mrs M Bean	Team inspector	Physical education	How well does the school care for its pupils?
Mrs J Thompson	Team inspector	Religious education	-

Mrs Sally Richardson	Team inspector	-	-
Mr Peter McGregor	Team inspector	-	-

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Inspection Quality Division
The Office for Standards in Education
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Maidstone Girls' Grammar is a large selective school with 823 girls in Years 7 to 11. There are 299 students in the sixth form, 28 of whom are boys. The attainment of the students on entry is well above average and average for Kent grammar schools. Just over three percent of students have special educational needs, which is well below the national average. No students have statements of special educational need. Just over three percent are from minority ethnic backgrounds. Of these students, 21 have English as an additional language but none are at a very early stage of English language acquisition. Twenty two students are entitled to free school meals, which is well below the national average. Some courses at A-level are offered in association with other local schools.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good and effective school. The management of the headteacher and senior management team is excellent and promotes the consistent achievement of very high standards. The management team have clear priorities for future development and successfully create a community in which relationships and attitudes are of the highest quality. The personal development of each student is valued and promoted alongside academic achievement. Teaching is good overall in Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. The school provides very good value for money.

What the school does well

- Students achieve very high standards of attainment at Key Stages 3 and 4, placing the school in the highest five percent nationally. In the sixth form A-level standards are high.
- A high proportion of very good or excellent teaching enables students to make rapid progress.
- The school provides a very good range of learning opportunities overall.
- The provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is very good.
- The school provides excellent support and guidance for students.
- The school has very effective links with parents and there is good parental involvement to support students' learning.

What could be improved

- The non-examination religious education course in the sixth form is not sufficiently challenging to the students and needs more teaching time.
- All students should take a design and technology subject in Key Stage 4 as required by the National Curriculum.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan.

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school has made very good improvement since the last inspection which took place in November 1994. Nearly all of the key issues identified by the last inspection have been addressed. The quality of development planning is now good and there has been significant improvement in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. The quality of teaching has improved with almost half being very good or excellent. The school has worked hard and done all that could be reasonably expected to improve the quality of accommodation, but deficiencies remain, such as the five temporary classrooms, which are in a poor state of repair. The only issue which has not been successfully addressed is the daily act of collective worship. The school has the commitment and capacity necessary for further improvement.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	C
A-levels/AS-levels	B	A	A	

Key	
very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

Nationally there are a small number of selective schools and for the purposes of comparison they are all grouped together. Selection procedures vary across the country and schools within the group admit different proportions of students from the age cohort. In Kent, the selection procedure admits on average 20-30 percent of the cohort. This is a much broader ability band than many schools in the national grammar school group. Comparisons with all selective schools are therefore of limited value.

Results of the 1999 GCSE examinations were in the highest five percent of schools nationally. This has been a consistent picture over the last three years. The school's GCSE results have improved at the same rate as the national improvement. In English, mathematics and science students' GCSE results in 1999 were very high. Students' achievement is excellent in English and science. Overall, very good achievement was seen in mathematics, although there is some underachievement in Year 11 by the group of students who take GCSE a year early. In almost all other subjects, standards are well above average or very high and students' achievements are very good or excellent. A-level results have improved over the last three years and are well above average. End of Key Stage 3 results in 1999 were in the highest five percent of all schools for English, mathematics and science. This has been a consistent picture from year to year. Compared with similar schools, overall results at Key Stage 3 were above average. English standards were well above average for similar schools, in science they were above average and in mathematics below average. The Key Stage 3 results have improved at the same rate as national improvement. Standards in almost all other subjects are well above average or very high. In modern foreign languages standards are above average, and average in music. Students' achievements are excellent in English and science and good in mathematics. In music they are sound, and in other subjects they range from good to excellent. Overall, students' achievements are very good throughout the school and this is the result of consistently good teaching and students' very positive attitudes to their work. The school has met the targets that it set for 1999. Targets have been set for the future which are sufficiently challenging.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent, a real strength of the school. Students speak warmly of the school, show high levels of motivation and work hard. This has a positive impact on learning.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Excellent. No permanent exclusions during the past year and only one fixed term exclusion.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent. Many opportunities are provided for students of all ages to take responsibilities. There is mutual respect between students and all other adults. Students were very positive about the effective way in which the school deals with any problems or disagreements that may arise.

Attendance	Good. Above the national average; minimal unauthorised absence.
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TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall 169	Good	Good	Very good

Inspectors make judgements about teaching in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. 'Satisfactory' means that the teaching is adequate and strengths outweigh weaknesses.

Overall, 97 percent of the teaching was satisfactory or better with 47 percent being very good or excellent. Three percent of teaching was unsatisfactory. Teaching in English was very good throughout the school. In mathematics it was good in Key Stages 3 and 4, and very good in the sixth form. The teaching of science was very good in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form, and good in Key Stage 4. The teaching of physical education was excellent throughout the school, and excellent in geography and sociology in the sixth form. In all other subjects teaching was consistently satisfactory and often good or very good. A significant strength in the teaching is the very good subject knowledge and understanding of coursework requirements shown by the teachers. Work is well planned to meet the needs of all students. The learning of students with special educational needs is managed very well and this enables them to make very good progress. The development of students' literacy and numeracy skills in subjects other than English and mathematics is good. There are significant strengths in students' learning. They show interest in their work and the ability to concentrate and work independently. As they get older, they develop a clear understanding of how well they are doing and they are very keen to succeed. Students make very good gains in learning throughout the school.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Curriculum provision has many significant strengths, including an extensive and wide-ranging extra-curricular programme. Provision for careers and work related education is good. Personal, social and health education is well planned and managed. The weaknesses are the failure to comply with the statutory requirement for all students to follow design and technology at Key Stage 4. Insufficient curriculum time to cover the religious education syllabus in general studies in the sixth form and the lack of a daily act of collective worship.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good. All students have equal access to the curriculum.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Appropriate provision is made.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good provision overall. Opportunities for moral and social development are excellent. Provision for cultural development is very good and it is good for spiritual development.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Procedures for child protection and ensuring students' welfare are very good. The support and guidance provided for students is excellent. The mentoring system in the sixth form is particularly effective in raising achievement.

There is effective partnership between students, parents and the school. High expectations are shared. The school takes very good care of its students. A weakness lies in the inconsistent use made by departments of the high quality assessment data which is available to help plan the next steps of students' learning.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent leadership and management by the headteacher and senior management team which promote high standards and effective teaching and learning. Most departments are effectively managed.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are well informed and knowledgeable. They are very effective in strategic planning. They know the strengths and weaknesses of the school well, although their approach to monitoring is not formal enough.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Significant improvement since the last inspection in the monitoring of teaching and learning, which have brought improvement for the students. Clear commitment to continued implementation of the monitoring programme to further improve standards of teaching and learning
The strategic use of resources	Spending is closely linked to educational priorities and available resources efficiently used. Very good long term plans, which have resulted in significant improvements in the school buildings. Weaknesses identified in the previous report have been addressed.

A very well organised and efficient senior management team which is committed to the high achievement and personal development of all students. They maintain a conspicuous presence around the school and this has a positive influence on the ethos. The school applies the principles of best value through very efficient and effective management and financial procedures. The school has a very good match of teachers and staff to support the curriculum and ensure that the school runs smoothly. The accommodation and resources are adequate to meet the needs of the curriculum. There have been significant improvements in developing the use of information technology throughout the school. Although the school has worked hard to improve accommodation, five temporary classrooms provide unsatisfactory learning environments.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Their children like school. • Their children make good progress. • Behaviour in the school is good. • The teaching is good. • They would feel comfortable about approaching the school. • The school expects students to work hard. • The school is well led and managed. • The school helps their children become mature and responsible. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The way the school works with parents. • The range of extra-curricular activities.

There is a high level of parental satisfaction. The inspectors share the parents' positive views about the school. Inspection evidence indicates that the provision of extra-curricular activities is excellent. The quality of information provided for parents is good, and the partnership between parents, students and the school is effective.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and achievements

1. In this report, the term “standards” refers to students' attainment relative to some clear benchmark, such as National Curriculum levels at the end of a key stage. “Above average standards”, for example, means that a higher proportion of students of a particular age are succeeding at or beyond the level set than in the majority of schools. 'Achievement' on the other hand, reflects the accomplishments of students in relation to what you would expect of these particular students. The students' prior attainment, what they can already do, is the reference point for students' achievement.

2. The school's results at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 were in the highest five percent in English, mathematics and science, when compared with all schools nationally. This has been a consistent picture from year to year, although there have been some minor fluctuations in English and science. Overall, results for English, mathematics and science have been very high. Standards in almost all other subjects are well above average or very high. Standards are above average in modern foreign languages and average in music. Students' achievements are excellent in English and science, and good in mathematics. In music, they are sound and in other subjects they range from good to excellent. Overall, students' achievements are very good throughout the school and this is the result of consistently good teaching and students' very positive attitudes to their work.

3. Nationally there are a small number of selective schools and for the purposes of comparison they are all grouped together. Selection procedures vary across the country and schools within the group admit different proportions of students from the age cohort. In Kent, the selection procedure admits on average 20-30 percent of the cohort. This is a much broader ability band than many schools in the national grammar school group. Comparisons with all selective schools are, therefore, of limited value.

4. Compared with similar schools, overall results at Key Stage 3 in 1999 were above average. English standards were well above average, in science they were above average and in mathematics below average. The trend in the school's average point score for all core subjects was broadly in line with the national trend over the past three years. Students' achievements in the nationally recognised cognitive ability tests (CAT), which are taken at the beginning of Year 7, are average for Kent selective schools. This data indicates that the school provides good added value. Students achieve very well throughout the key stage.

5. In 1999, the proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE A*-C passes at 96.5 percent was in the highest five percent when compared to the national average. This has been a consistent picture over the last three years. The proportion of students gaining five A*- G grades, at 98 percent, was very high when compared to the national average. The school's average total GCSE point score per student has been rising in line with the national trend.

6. Compared with similar schools in 1999, the proportion of students attaining five or more A*-C and A*- G grades is below average. The proportions achieving one or more A*- G grades are very high. The average point score per student is average. For various reasons in 1999, three students did not take all of their GCSE examinations. This factor had an impact on the results against similar schools as the percentage difference between the average and below average grades is small. Statistical data is not available to indicate entry standards for those students who took GCSE in 1999 to provide an accurate measure of added value.

7. In English, mathematics and science, students' GCSE results in 1999 were very high. These standards were reflected in the lessons and the work seen, with excellent achievement in English and science. Overall, very good achievement was seen in mathematics, however, current arrangements for students who take their GCSE examination a year early are unacceptable. The work is insufficiently challenging and the use of mathematics lessons for private study reduces curriculum time for these very able and successful mathematicians. This leads to some underachievement in Year 11 for this group of students.

8. In almost all other subjects, standards were well above average or very high and students' achievements are very good or excellent. In modern foreign languages GCSE results are above the national average for similar schools, but are below the school and national averages for the number of students achieving the highest A* and A grades. This is due to some relative weaknesses in teaching.

9. The school has met the targets that it set for 1999. Appropriate targets have been set for the future and agreed with the local education authority. These have been based on assessment data, such as that gained from nationally recognised tests.

10. The school has been focussing on improving standards in students' A-level performance and over the past three years the average point score of students entered for two or more A-levels has increased. In the A-level examinations in 1999, the average point score achieved by students studying two or more A-levels was well above the national average.

11. Standards in A-level sociology are very high and students' achievements are excellent. In English, science, government and politics, and music standards are well above average and students' achievements are very good. Standards in mathematics and art are above average and achievements are very good. In geography, standards in the 1999 examination were average, however the proportion of students achieving higher grades was well below average. Students' achievements were unsatisfactory. Current standards in Year 13 geography are well above the expected level with very good results in the examination modules tested. In history, all students passed the 1999 examination but not enough gained the higher grades. There was some variation in the standard of students' work in the two lessons seen which was related to the quality of teaching and the level of teacher expertise. In French the number of students gaining the highest grades was well below the school and national average. The overall pass rate was below the national and the school average. Current standards are above average with high quality written work, most notably in Year 12. In German and Spanish, the number of students taking the examination in 1999 was small, the highest grade achieved was a B in German. In design and technology, the number of students taking the course in 1999 was small. All students achieved a pass, with a significant proportion gaining higher grades. Current standards in design and technology are above average. In physical education, a group of students currently in Year 13 will be the first to sit the A-level examination and standards are above average. A high proportion of the nine students entered for A-level religious education in 1999 gained the highest grades and students' achievements are very good. In business studies and economics, results have fluctuated. The standards of the current Year 13 students are above average. In theatre studies, performance is a strength and students achieve well. Some difficulties in literacy impede higher levels of attainment as the syllabus requires a considerable proportion of written coursework. Standards in physical education lessons are generally above or well above average. Students' information technology skills are well above average.

12. Standards overall, at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4, observed in lessons and through recorded work, are very high. Current standards in the sixth form are well above average.

13. Students develop and apply a wide range of literacy and numeracy skills as they move through the school, although there are no whole school guidelines. The school places emphasis on oral work in lessons and students become more self-assured as they move through the school. They are encouraged

to read widely in most subjects and read aloud in class and assemblies. Independent research skills are well developed through use of the library, the Internet and the media. There are good examples of writing for different purposes in all subjects. However, where extended essays are required in some A-level subjects, such as history, the quality of planning and drafting is inconsistent and this has a negative effect on the quality of the finished work. Numeracy skills such as the use of graphs, spreadsheets and calculus are effectively promoted in several subjects such as science, design and technology, geography and modern foreign languages.

14. Students with special educational needs make very good progress. Individual education plans are in place and have appropriate targets to meet students' learning needs. The school has started to develop provision to meet the needs of very able and gifted students. Outstanding work has been produced outside lessons. For example, by Year 7 students in the writing club, by sixth formers in the science magazine and by numerous gifted and very able students in dramatic and musical performances and mathematics challenges. As yet, extension activities are not as well developed within the classroom.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

15. Students' attitudes to school are excellent and similar to those reported at the time of the previous inspection. Parents commented that their children like coming to school. Students show respect for the school building and the equipment they use. Relationships in the school are excellent, with mutual respect between students and all other adults. Students are invariably polite and helpful, for example offering to show visitors to a particular room. In discussions, they speak warmly about the friendly atmosphere, and students in Year 7 remarked about the very good relationships with sixth formers.

16. In lessons, students' attitudes are almost always good or better. They show high levels of motivation, arrive at lessons on time and settle to work quickly. This has a positive impact on learning, for example in physical education where students get changed during break times, which ensures a very prompt start to lessons. They work hard and maintain concentration for significant periods of time. Students work very well both individually and in groups, and are fully involved during lessons. They are willing to share ideas and value the contributions of others. Students are conscientious about completing research and homework tasks. They listen carefully to their teachers and each other, and make thoughtful contributions to class discussions. High levels of confidence are shown by older students when contributing to assemblies. In class, students in all year groups show a willingness to ask questions if they do not understand or require a point to be clarified. At lunchtime, a large number of students take part in extra-curricular activities and many take part in music and drama productions such as the Millennium Mysteries. All of these factors make a significant contribution to students' learning.

17. The behaviour of students is excellent. At lunchtime and breaks, students behave in a very mature manner. During discussions, students were very positive about behaviour in school and no bullying was reported. They said that any problems or disagreements were dealt with by the school very promptly and effectively, and teachers were very approachable. Inspectors' findings confirmed these positive views. Behaviour in lessons is of a high standard and this enables students to make rapid progress. No instances of unsatisfactory behaviour were observed during the inspection. There have been no permanent exclusions during the past year and only one fixed term exclusion, which is well below national averages.

18. Many opportunities are provided for students' personal development. Sixth formers are very good role models for younger students. They make a significant contribution to school life for example, running clubs at lunchtime and getting involved with charity events. Their conduct around the school is exemplary and they have very positive attitudes towards their studies. Students of all ages have

opportunities to take a range of responsibilities such as form captains and charity representatives. The school council provides good opportunities for students to take responsibility and contributes to their understanding of citizenship. In discussions, students were generally positive about the council and expressed the view that they had a voice in the running of the school.

19. Attendance is good and remains above the national average. There is minimal unauthorised absence. Levels of punctuality are good despite the fact that many students travel considerable distances to school. Registration takes place promptly at the start of morning and afternoon sessions. Lessons begin and end on time and very little time is wasted.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

20. Overall, the quality of teaching was good and has improved since the previous inspection. Teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 was good and it was very good in the sixth form. In Key Stages 3 and 4 just over seven out of ten lessons were good or better and over four out of ten were very good or excellent. In the sixth form almost nine out of ten lessons were good or better and five out of ten were very good or excellent. Teaching of the highest quality was observed in each key stage. In Key Stages 3 and 4 around one in seven lessons were of excellent quality. In the sixth form the teaching in just over one in three lessons was excellent. A very small amount of unsatisfactory teaching was observed in each key stage.

21. Teaching in English was very good throughout the school. In mathematics, it was good in Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. The teaching of science was very good in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form and good in Key Stage 4. The teaching of physical education was excellent throughout the school. Teaching was also excellent in geography and sociology in the sixth form. Consistently good or very good teaching was observed in art, information technology, and religious education in all key stages and in geography in Key Stages 3 and 4. In all other subjects teaching was consistently satisfactory and often good or very good, although there are some relative weaknesses in the teaching of modern foreign languages throughout the school and history at A-level. Teaching was best in the sixth form.

22. There are significant strengths in students' learning. They show interest in their work and the ability to concentrate and work independently on tasks. As they get older, they develop a clear understanding of how well they are doing and they are very keen to succeed. In a few less effective lessons, students showed self-motivation and determination and this enabled them to make good progress although the teaching was somewhat pedestrian. Overall, students make very good gains in learning throughout the school.

23. Teachers are aware of targets set in individual education plans for the small number of students with special educational needs. They ensure that appropriate work is planned to meet the needs of individuals and this enables them to make very good progress.

24. There are many strengths in teaching throughout the school and staff show a high level of commitment. A significant strength is the very good subject knowledge and understanding of examination course work requirements shown by the teachers. In religious education, for example, teachers confidently engage in discussion and explain ideas carefully. This enables students to deepen their own knowledge and understanding of religions. In a number of subjects such as English, science, music, geography, art, physical education and sociology, teachers' very good subject knowledge enables them to set challenging tasks and provide interesting teaching. In a Year 12 geography lesson the topic of "pollution" was introduced, the teacher was able to effectively build an overview of the topic by challenging questioning and drawing on students' existing knowledge. In art, teachers' very good subject knowledge enables them to provide students with excellent guidance and coaching in the

development of expressive and technical skills. They are taught how to use a range of materials and are able to develop these and work independently. In many lessons the very good quality of questioning enables teachers to check students' understanding and provide additional help and guidance when necessary. Teachers' very good understanding of examination requirements enables them to plan work effectively to cover all aspects of the syllabus. However, there are some weaknesses in teacher expertise in the teaching of A-level history. Teachers make very good use of homework and this is well planned to develop students' independent study skills and consolidate previous learning. A number of parents commented favourably on the organisation and planning of homework.

25. Almost all teachers plan their lessons well. Thorough planning in almost all subjects ensures that students receive lessons which effectively build on previous work and this helps them make significant gains in their learning. In the best lessons, they use a variety of activities which develop a range of skills. In physical education for example, teachers make very good use of progressive practice which enables students to develop their skills successfully. There is a lack of consistency in the planning of work in modern foreign languages. In a few lessons, tasks are not planned to allow students to develop confidence in using language, too much teaching focuses on tasks rather than developing skills in the language.

26. Teachers have high expectations of their students. In almost all lessons, the work planned challenges students and encourages them to think for themselves and develop their own ideas. For example, in a history lesson on the Treaty of Versailles students were encouraged to apply their existing knowledge and understanding to determine the motives of world leaders. They were able to advance their understanding of links with events of future years. There are weaknesses in a small number of lessons, for example in mathematics, where expectations are too low and the pace is slow. In the very few lessons where teaching lacks sufficient challenge, students are conscientious and put considerable effort into their work. This enables them to make good learning gains.

27. A range of teaching methods are effectively used by almost all teachers and this is an improvement since the time of the last inspection. There is now a wider use of information technology to support students' learning in subjects such as English, science and music. Class management is very good in Key Stages 3 and 4, and excellent in the sixth form. There are very good relationships between teachers and students, and this has a positive impact on students' learning. In almost all lessons, teachers provide a range of interesting and stimulating work and students respond positively. Many teachers run "surgeries" in their own time to provide additional support and this is valued by students. Lessons in physical education provide opportunities for students to plan and evaluate their work as well as perform, and this is an improvement since the last inspection. In geography, group work is used effectively to enable students to collaborate in making decisions and then present their findings. In a very well taught Year 11 English lesson, students were given a part of a photograph. In their minds they created a character full of life and ambition based on the photograph. They were stunned when shown his full photograph taken in a military hospital after the 1st World War – the young man and his friends had lost their limbs. They then listened to the poem "Disabled" by Wilfred Owen and were moved by the experience. The teaching methods used in this lesson were particularly effective.

28. Lessons start very promptly and almost all teachers make effective use of the time available. Very good working routines are in place, which ensure that no teaching time is wasted. Good use is made of technical support staff and teachers use a wider range of resources than that reported at the time of the last inspection. Teachers mark students work regularly and the overall quality of ongoing assessment is good.

29. The development of students' literacy and numeracy skills in subjects other than English and mathematics is good, although there is no planned whole school policy. There are examples of writing for different purposes in all subjects and good development of research skills. However, when extended

essays are required, for example in the sixth form, students are not always given sufficient guidance on planning and drafting and this has an impact on the quality of the finished work. Teachers effectively develop students' speaking and listening skills through activities such as group discussion and reporting to the whole class. Throughout the school, students apply mathematical skills such as drawing graphs, data handling and use of spreadsheets. In the sixth form, they use indices, exponential graphs and differential/integral calculus in science.

HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?

30. At Key Stage 3, the curriculum is broad, balanced and appropriate to students' abilities. The full National Curriculum is taught with the addition of drama, personal, social and health education and, from Year 8, a second foreign language of students' choice. Information technology is taught as a subject in Year 7, and is developed across the curriculum in Years 8 and 9. Provision of information technology has improved since the last inspection.

31. At Key Stage 4, students follow a core curriculum of English, mathematics, science, information technology, religious education, personal, social and health education and physical education. Fifteen other courses are available as options to enable students to construct a curriculum suited to their personal aptitudes and aspirations. Science is offered as either a double GCSE or as three separate subjects. A number of students opt to continue studying two languages. Students' choice is guided by a requirement that they study a humanity, a language and a creative or technological subject. However, the statutory requirement that all students study a technological subject at Key Stage 4 is not met.

32. The range of the sixth form curriculum is excellent, offering 23 A-level subjects, an AS level in information technology and GCSE photography. A-level courses in music, music technology, graphic design and computing are offered in association with other local schools. The sixth form curriculum is enhanced by an excellent general studies programme in which students can choose a series of study blocks from a total of 25 courses. Religious education is included for all students, but is allocated insufficient time to cover the Agreed Syllabus. This does not meet the statutory requirement for the subject. The curriculum has many strengths, but the school's failure to comply with statutory requirements on design and technology, religious education in the sixth form and the provision of a daily act of collective worship are significant weaknesses. Issues identified in the last inspection concerning information technology, design and technology and art have been addressed.

33. Students with special educational needs are well provided for. All students have equal access to the curriculum at all levels - for example those who have taken double science GCSE are able to take A-level science courses. Although there are no policies on literacy and numeracy, the school has good strategies for developing these basic skills.

34. The curriculum is well planned. Particular strengths include emphasis on oral work in English, a good range of learning opportunities in mathematics and careful planning in modern languages so that students can attain comparable levels in two languages by the end of Key Stage 3. The quality and range of the physical education curriculum is very good and there are good schemes of work in information technology. Provision of three-dimensional work in art and the use of resistant materials in design and technology have improved significantly since the last inspection. Plans for the introduction of the new sixth form curriculum in September 2000 are well advanced. The amount of teaching time each week is less than the minimum recommended by the DfEE, though there is no evidence that this has an adverse impact on standards. This is to be reviewed by the governing body following the introduction of the new sixth form curriculum.

35. The extra-curricular programme is extensive and wide-ranging and is a strength of the school. The programme for the week of the inspection listed 30 different activities including a range of music and sport, a charity fund-raising event, the Duke of Edinburgh's Award scheme, subject surgeries and workshops and rehearsals for one of the school's stage productions. In addition, there are many visits to theatres as well as community service activities. The school participates successfully in the national mathematics challenges.

36. The personal, social and health education programme is a taught component of the curriculum for all students. It is very well planned and managed, including regular monitoring and review by heads of year. All the key elements are covered, including sex education, drugs education, bullying, careers education and relationships. A number of outside speakers contribute to the richness and diversity of the programme. Younger students in particular expressed very positive views on the course.

37. The quality of provision for careers and work-related education is good and all students study relevant issues. Form tutors are responsible for teaching aspects of careers and are supported by co-ordinating staff and a good range of resources geared to local opportunities. The school has recently refurbished a small area as a careers library to which all students have open access. All Year 11 students have a careers interview and prepare their own careers action plan. They then find their own work experience placements for a week after the GCSE examinations. They write a report to evaluate their work experience for their Record of Achievement. In the sixth form, students have further opportunities for careers interviews and use information technology to produce personal statements for the Record of Achievement. Preparation for university entrance is thorough and well supported by school staff and the careers service.

38. The governors' curriculum sub-committee meets at least once a term. Governors are kept well informed of developments and show a good level of awareness of issues related to the curriculum. The system of linking governors to particular subjects is effective in involving and informing them in the practical working of the curriculum.

39. There are good curricular links with similar schools in Maidstone at sixth form level. Links with the wider community, including higher education institutions, are good.

40. All students have equal access to the full range of the curriculum and benefit according to need. Boys in the sixth form confirm that they are well supported and suitably inducted into the school. The equal opportunities policy permeates the school's ethos and is highlighted through assemblies and the personal, social and health education programme, which includes issues of gender stereotyping. Staff have a good awareness of equal opportunities issues although, to date, the policy has only been informally monitored and reviewed.

41. There is a strong commitment to promoting students' personal development. The importance which is attached to this is evident in the interest and involvement of both students and staff in the school community, and extra-curricular activities. In a number of subjects, students are given opportunities to reflect on aspects of their lives, explore beliefs and interpret their experiences. For example, in English there is some thoughtful reflection through poetry, and in religious education students study and explore social and personal issues from the perspectives of Christianity and Islam, as well as engaging in sensitive and honest discussions of ethical issues. The spiritual dimension is also present in areas such as the extensive music curriculum, and in art where students are encouraged to reflect on their personal reaction to works of art. Much of the personal and social education programme helps them acquire knowledge and insight into their own and other people's values. While spiritual development across the school is good overall, there are areas such as mathematics and science where opportunities are missed to develop and foster a sense of wonder and intellectual excitement.

42. Assemblies are well ordered and organised. They provide opportunities for large numbers of students to meet, often learning of each other's achievements both in and out of school. The assemblies do make a powerful contribution to moral and social development, although, during the inspection week, students were not given sufficient opportunities for private reflection and prayer and the assemblies did not significantly develop spiritual awareness. A striking feature of assemblies is the use of live musicians and singers. They are listened to attentively and applauded spontaneously. As was the case during the last inspection, there is no daily collective act of worship for all students.

43. Moral development is excellent and is a strength of the school. Teachers respond to students' needs and are committed to promoting fairness and respect. These values are implicit in all aspects of school life. Teaching about principles of right and wrong and the importance of caring for others occur for example in assemblies, in personal and social education lessons, as well as a number of other subjects. Moral issues, such as conflict and reconciliation and medical ethics are raised and discussed during English and religious education lessons. A good range of moral themes including drugs, racism, terrorism and euthanasia is covered in modern foreign languages lessons. In history, students are asked to consider the moral implications of the treatment of different religious groups in various societies and the persecution of minorities at different points in time.

44. Provision for social development is excellent. The school is effective because relationships are based on trust and mutual respect, and students have confidence in their teachers. Students are clear that bullying is unacceptable, and the supportive culture encourages them to seek help appropriately. Members of the school community look after each other and respect each others' opinions. Personal views are valued and students are encouraged to express themselves openly in a supportive atmosphere. There are very good opportunities for them to take on responsibility. The school council provides a very good opportunity for representative students from each year to raise and debate issues. Students themselves initiate fund-raising for a wide range of charities through a variety of events including a popular annual rag week. Last year alone, the school raised a total of over £10,000 for local, national and international charities. In addition, a significant number of students are involved in the Duke of Edinburgh award and take part in community service activities, devoting considerable time and effort to the needs of others. There are excellent opportunities for students to engage in a wide range of extra-curricular activities, and these add to their social and cultural development. Many are held during the lunchhour so that students living a long way from the school can take part.

45. Older students are encouraged to be active citizens, taking responsibility through running clubs, managing sports teams and assisting in Year 7 tutor groups. The school has chosen to accept a number of boys into the sixth form and they are fully integrated and accepted.

46. In lessons there are many opportunities for students to work collaboratively and co-operatively. For example, in art learning is a social occasion where they are encouraged to talk about their work and share ideas, and in physical education they are expected to develop a sense of fair play, to work co-operatively as well as competitively and in a friendly spirit.

47. The school promotes cultural development well. Some good opportunities are provided across the curriculum, particularly in history, geography, art, music and design and technology for students to appreciate their own and other cultural heritages. The modern languages department organises trips and exchange visits to France, Germany and Spain, giving students the chance to have first-hand experience of other cultures. A rich programme of visits to theatrical productions by the English and drama departments enriches cultural awareness and appreciation. School drama productions involve many students and are strongly supported by parents and students. Many students are also involved in high quality choirs and instrumental groups which give performances in the school. The school is about to stage the second part of the ambitious and impressively moving Millennium Mystery Play, having presented the first part to parents and friends in December. The first part was extremely well received,

and the school received a letter from the Bishop of Maidstone who was clearly impressed by an outstanding performance.

48. There are many opportunities beyond the school for students to develop their social, cultural and business skills; they take part in a work experience programme, the Neighbourhood Engineer Scheme and the Young Enterprise scheme, and a number of sixth formers participate in the Community Sports Leadership Awards.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

49. Procedures for monitoring students' academic and personal development are very good. Students are very well known by their teachers, particularly form tutors and heads of year. Long term assessment criteria are clearly communicated to students in a number of subjects, for example physical education, and this ensures that students are constantly aware of the targets for which they are aiming. The mentoring system in the sixth form is particularly effective in ensuring that not only is progress and development constantly monitored but students are kept fully informed about their progress and what they need to do to improve. These procedures are effective in helping to raise students' levels of achievement.

50. Good support and provision is available for students who have special educational needs. The school effectively identifies and assesses students who have a range of learning needs and medical conditions. All individual education plans are now in place and communicated to teachers. They are appropriately written to meet the learning needs of each student, clear targets are set and reviewed each term. Parents are regularly consulted, reports made to the designated governor, and expert advice sought from a wide range of support agencies. A recent local authority audit complimented the school on its special needs provision and support.

51. The school has a comprehensive assessment policy. A wide range of data including the results of nationally recognised tests, end of key stage National Curriculum tests and GCSE and A-levels is gathered and analysed by a member of the senior management team and systematic records are being developed. The school also undertakes value added analysis. This provides high quality data for departments. Some departments make excellent use of the information but others make insufficient use of the data to help plan students' next steps of learning. Departments consistently use the sixth form value added data to monitor students' performance. Strategies for improving the monitoring of student performance, including target setting and mentoring are included in the school development plan.

52. Arrangements for child protection are in place and comply with locally agreed procedures. All staff are kept well informed and the name of the designated person is clearly published in the staff handbook. Health and safety is regularly monitored and appropriate safety checks and risk assessments are carried out, for example on electrical wiring and physical education equipment. Procedures and their implementation are very good.

53. The induction programme for Year 7 students is very good and there is very good guidance offered for Year 9 and Year 11 students with regard to future subject choices. The personal, social and health education programme throughout the school is comprehensive and is very well structured to promote healthy and safe living. It includes sections on peer pressure, drugs, alcohol and sex education as well as other aspects such as decision making and bullying. Outside speakers such as the police and the school nurse are used appropriately to enhance the delivery of this programme and they make an invaluable contribution to it. The programme is regularly and systematically monitored and reviewed by the deputy head and the heads of year. There are now good monitoring procedures for both the tutorial

programme and personal, social and health education, and this is an improvement since the previous inspection.

54. The excellent ethos of the school promotes high standards of behaviour. There is an expectation that everyone will show courtesy and respect and this promotes an atmosphere where bullying and harassment are not tolerated. Many parents commented that the school takes appropriate action to follow up any instances of bullying and students reported that prompt and effective action is taken.

55. The school has very good procedures for monitoring and promoting attendance. Students are rarely late either at school in the morning or getting to lessons. There are high expectations of attendance and the students accept this and comply.

56. Overall the school takes very good care of its students and this is an improvement since the last inspection when care and guidance was judged to be satisfactory. Where there is a weakness it lies in the inconsistent use made within departments of the high quality data provided, to enhance students learning.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

57. There is an effective partnership between students, parents and the school. Responses at the pre-inspection meeting and to the parents' questionnaire indicate a high level of satisfaction among parents and few criticisms. They value education, want to see their children doing well and are involved in their children's learning at school and at home. Parental consultation evenings are very well attended and many parents regularly read and sign their child's homework diary, helping to establish the importance of completing homework. A number help with educational visits and with transport to and from sports matches. The Parents and Friends' Association represents a committed core of parents who organise events and raise funds for the school and provide refreshments at school events. The Association recently paid for a multi-media projector and equipment for the Duke of Edinburgh award. While parental involvement is good overall, there is often a modest turn-out to some events including the Governors Annual Meeting for Parents.

58. Opportunities are provided for parents to comment on initiatives such as the home-school agreement and the anti-bullying policy, and the school responded to parents' views on changing the format of the academic reports. There are regular newsletters which record school successes and provide information about what is going on. Information about students' work and progress is provided through annual parents' evenings, an interim report, and a full report at the end of the summer term. Reports for students in the sixth form are particularly informative and show that the staff know students well. Academic reports for other year groups contain adequate details about students' work and progress.

59. Parents are invited in whenever necessary to discuss students' progress and are encouraged to contact the school whenever they have concerns. Staff are quick to involve parents if there is any concern over an individual student. The good alliance between home and school, and shared expectations about the importance of aiming for high standards, has a positive impact on students' learning and personal development. The quality of the relationships with parents has been maintained since the last inspection.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

60. The leadership and management of the headteacher and senior managers are excellent. Their inspirational leadership provides clear educational direction for the work of the school and its priorities for development. It is firmly based in its commitment “to value all members of the school community in an atmosphere of learning which is friendly, supportive and challenging”. The school has a tradition of academic excellence and this is clearly evident in the students’ results in GCSE and A-level examinations. The belief that “developing personal skills and qualities is equally important in preparing for a fulfilling adult life” is evident in the demeanour of students and the quality of relationships. The headteacher and senior staff maintain a conspicuous presence around the school and this positively influences its ethos.

61. The senior management team is very well organised; their roles are clearly specified and there is effective delegation. All involved in the management of the school have clear remits, responsibilities have been prescribed carefully, they are clearly accountable and there are effective channels of communication. The senior management team functions efficiently and the strengths of individual members combine in the effective management of the school. The school development plan identifies improvement as a constant priority and committees meet regularly to develop the school’s procedures. Members of the senior management team act as line managers to specified departments and are able to monitor developments and provide support. Many departments are very effectively managed. The management of all other departments is at least satisfactory, with the exception of modern foreign languages where there are weaknesses in development planning and monitoring.

62. The governing body comprises both long serving members and a significant number of recent appointees. Governors are kept very well informed and are strongly supportive of the school. They acknowledge and respect the professionalism of the headteacher and staff and work closely with them in ensuring that their statutory responsibilities are fulfilled. This approach works very well overall though some statutory requirements are not fully met. The monitoring role of governors has been improved. Each department has a designated governor, a ‘critical friend’. Some attend lessons. There is not a formalised approach to their monitoring role though all receive very good reports from departments at the end of each year.

63. The governing body is very much aware of the strengths and weaknesses of the school and plays a major role in strategic planning and development. They are involved in the drawing-up of the school development plan and collaborate closely with the headteacher and members of the senior management team in identifying future priorities. There is a well-established procedure for development planning and, since the time of the last report, improvements have been made in the quality of the plan, particularly in the areas of cost-effectiveness and budget planning. The current strategic development plan is good. There is a clear schedule for planning at departmental and school levels, responsibilities for developments are allocated to key personnel, there is a time scale for review and resource implications are listed. There are procedures for monitoring its success. The principal priorities are ‘Curriculum 2000’, the identification of low and under-achievers and the development of support strategies, the continued development of strategies for monitoring student performance including target setting and mentoring, performance management and the further development of information technology. The quality of departmental development plans has been improved since the time of the previous report, in almost all cases such plans reflect the priorities of the school’s strategic development plan and many are good.

64. Since the time of the last report, there has been a significant improvement in the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning. A good range of procedures and systems is now in place, for instance there is observation of teaching by heads of department and line managers with feedback being given to teachers. Also, there is some sharing of good practice within and between departments. Such

procedures have already proved successful in bringing about improvement for a number of staff, but there is still some way to go for a small minority whose teaching skills are insufficiently effective. The management team is strongly committed to the wider and more rigorous implementation of these and similar strategies.

65. Procedures for the monitoring of the curriculum are in place and are carried out by the senior management team as one of their responsibilities as line managers to the departments. They are involved in the preparation of the departmental reports and report to the headteacher and governors. The school is developing the use of information technology in the curriculum, building upon the improvements achieved over the past two years. To this end, the school has applied for and received grant aid. Systems suitable for the storing of assessment data, pupil profiles and records have been installed which are being used in the monitoring of progress and tracking of students. Such development is identified as a priority of the school and there is an ongoing programme of in-service training.

66. The governing body has a strong grasp of finance and works closely with the headteacher and the resources manager in the management of fiscal resources. A very high standard of financial planning is evident. The large budget surplus results from the intention to fund a further improvement in the quality of the accommodation. All available resources are efficiently used, and grants received by the school are very well used for their specified purpose. Financial administration is very efficient and the recommendations made in the most recent audit have been implemented.

67. The governors and headteacher are aware of and apply best value principles. They analyse available data such as test results in order to identify areas of strength and weakness, and this is shared with departments. The use made of the data varies. Some departments, for example science, make excellent use of the information whilst others, such as English, are still at an early stage of development. The comparison of costs with other schools is now taking place as data becomes available. The school regularly seeks the views of parents through questionnaires and meetings. Parents are kept well informed about planned changes. The views of students are taken into account through the regular school council meetings. The headteacher and governors have ensured that high standards have been maintained and improvements made in a number of areas. Rigorous value for money checks are made by the school to ensure that the most competitive prices are achieved.

68. Overall, the school has a very good match of teachers and staff to support the curriculum and to ensure the school runs smoothly. The accommodation and resources are adequate to meet the needs of the curriculum. There have been significant improvements in developing the use of information technology throughout the school. This was an area of weakness identified in the previous inspection report and opportunities and access in most subjects are now better.

69. Weaknesses in the deployment of senior staff, identified in the previous inspection report, have been addressed and there is now an appropriate balance of responsibilities shared between members of the senior management team. The limited technical support for information technology and design technology, has been improved and is now satisfactory. There have been considerable improvements made to the central library including new and refurbished accommodation and additional resources. It is now an attractive multi-media resource centre. Good use is made of the facilities at break and lunchtime but there is no full-time librarian and this limits the use of this central resource. Such is the demand for the library, there is now a shortage of study spaces, particularly for sixth formers. There are proposals in hand to address this and to build an open learning centre.

70. The systems for teacher appraisal are in place to meet national requirements for performance review but currently they are not fully operational. In the meantime, heads of departments have undertaken, as part of their general management responsibilities, a programme of reviews alongside routine classroom observations. Meetings are held between senior staff and subject leaders to review

examination results, set targets for the following year and discuss training requirements. These meetings prove very effective in ensuring there are good systems of communication in place and generate a shared commitment to improvement. Newly qualified teachers and other new staff are supported through a very good programme of induction meetings and lesson observations.

71. Effective use is made of the available accommodation. The outdoor sports facilities are well maintained and generally litter free, the indoor accommodation is clean with good quality display. However, many of the corridors and stairways are very narrow for the number of students that use them and there is overcrowding at certain times during the day. The accommodation is adequate because students treat it with respect and behave responsibly towards one another. The school has worked hard to improve existing accommodation. Careful budget planning has enabled funding of a number of improvements since the time of the last inspection. There are, however, five temporary classrooms used for some English and drama lessons and this accommodation is unsatisfactory. These rooms are in a very poor state of repair and have a negative impact on learning. For many years minor repairs have been carried out as efforts to replace and upgrade this accommodation have been unsuccessful. Since the inspection, agreement has been reached to replace this temporary accommodation.

72. The lack of office accommodation for some departments remains a weakness and makes the use and management of resources very difficult. Overall, resources are adequate. Some departments hold a good selection of books and other resources. Information technology resources have improved although there are currently problems with the reliability of equipment and access for some subjects is difficult. In religious education, there are too few books in the library to support students' learning.

73. The headteacher and governing body have high expectations and are strongly committed to the further improvement and development of the school. The contributions of individual teachers are valued and there is a team ethos. The staff share the values based on the school's aims and they are aware of the priorities for development. Systems and procedures are in place to enable the school to achieve the priorities identified. The school has both the commitment and capacity necessary for further improvement.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

74. To continue the development within the school and to further raise standards the governors, headteacher and staff should:

- (1) respond to the current non-compliance with statutory requirements:
 - that all students in Key Stage 4 should follow a course in design and technology, taking into account the regulations for curriculum flexibility from September 2000;
 - ensure that the non-examination religious education course in the sixth form is challenging to the students and has the required amount of teaching time.

para:31-2,78,136,193,196

75. In addition the governors, headteacher and staff should consider addressing the following lesser weaknesses in their action plan (almost all of these points for improvement are specified or referred to in the school development plan): continue to develop the monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning, particularly by heads of department (*para 61.64,137,154,162,175*); improve the consistency of teaching and the quality of planning in modern foreign languages (*para 8,21,25,172*); improve the consistency of teaching in A-level history (*para 11,21,24,148,151*); improve provision for Year 11 students who take GCSE mathematics a year early (*para 7,109*); continue to improve resources and teacher expertise in information technology (*para 72,95,111,163*); ensure that available assessment

data is consistently used by all departments to further improve standards (*para 51,127,152*); continue with plans to improve weaknesses in accommodation such as the poor quality temporary classrooms, the availability of independent study space for sixth form students and some information technology accommodation (*para 71-2,95,122,145,154,163,182*).

OTHER SPECIFIED FEATURES

SIXTH FORM

76. There are nearly 300 students in the sixth form. Standards are well above national averages. The quality of teaching and learning and the general standard of work seen during the inspection were very good.

77. Although there are minimum entry requirements, the sixth form is a socially inclusive community. Boys have been admitted since 1995 and are well integrated into the sixth form. Good induction programmes are provided for internal and external applicants after the GCSE examinations and in the first week of Year 12.

78. Overall, curriculum provision is very good: students can choose from a wide range of A-level courses and every effort is made to meet their different needs. Religious education is included for all students, however, the time allocated is insufficient to cover the Agreed Syllabus. The curriculum is enriched by an excellent general studies programme.

79. Sixth formers play a leading role in the school's extra-curricular programme, organising many of the clubs and activities. Other significant ways in which they contribute to the life of the school include providing leadership as head students, senior students, house captains and members of the sixth form council. They organise major social and charity events and help produce the school Year Book.

80. The school provides very good academic and personal support and guidance for students. A very committed management group oversees the work of a team of 16 form tutors. Students' progress is regularly monitored through the tutorial system and individual interviews, and they are involved in personal target-setting and constructing their own personal and career profiles. Some three-quarters of students go on to higher education.

81. Given the high standards students attain, the quality and range of courses they follow, the support they receive and the significant contribution they make to the life of the whole school, the sixth form is a clear strength of the school.

GERMAN

82. see modern foreign languages

SPANISH

83. see modern foreign languages

• **PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS**

84.

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	169
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils	36

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
22	24.5	33	17.5	3	0	0

The table gives the percentage of teaching observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about lessons.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7- Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	823	299
Number of full-time pupils eligible for free school meals	22	0

Special educational needs	Y7- Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	0	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	24	14

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	21

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	9
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	27

Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	6.6
National comparative data	7.9

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.1

Both tables give the percentage of half days (sessions) missed through absence for the latest complete reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	0	170	170

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	169	169	168
	Total	169	169	168
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (99)	99 (100)	99 (100)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	91 (97)	95 (99)	93 (90)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	169	169	169
	Total	169	169	169
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (100)	99 (100)	99 (100)
	National	64 (62)	64 (64)	60 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	92 (96)	99 (100)	89 (94)
	National	31 (31)	37 (37)	28 (31)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	0	174	174

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	N/a	N/a	N/a
	Girls	167	171	174
	Total	167	171	174
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	96 (100)	98 (100)	100 (100)
	National	46.3(44.6)	90.7 (89.8)	95.7(95.2)

Percentages in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	60 (61)
	National	37.8 (36.8)

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment at the end of the sixth form

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	6	139	145

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	20	19.3	19.3 (19.3)	n/a	n/a	n/a
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (17.6)	2.7	2.8	2.8

Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

International Baccalaureate	Number	% success rate
Number entered for the International Baccalaureate Diploma and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all they studied	School	n/a
	National	n/a

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	2
Black – other	0
Indian	15
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	5
White	1083
Any other minority ethnic group	2

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7– Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	68.5
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.3

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	8.0
Total aggregate hours worked per week	266

Deployment of teachers: Y7– Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	75.56
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	26.4
Key Stage 4	23.8
Year 7-11	25.3

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	1	0
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

This table gives the number of exclusions, which may be different from the number of pupils excluded.

Financial information

Financial year	1998/99
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	£
Total income	2646937
Total expenditure	2609503
Expenditure per pupil	2349
Balance brought forward from previous year	249438
Balance carried forward to next year	286872

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1122
Number of questionnaires returned	501

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	50	46	3	1	0
My child is making good progress in school.	62	35	1	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	44	51	2	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	29	57	10	3	2
The teaching is good.	41	54	2	0	3
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	33	54	10	2	1
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	56	37	4	1	2
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	71	26	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	28	52	15	1	4
The school is well led and managed.	50	47	1	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	52	42	3	0	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	35	45	11	2	8

Other issues raised by parents

Overall, the written responses and comments at the parents' meeting were very positive. Parents expressed general satisfaction with standards and felt that the school provided well for all students.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES

ENGLISH

85. At Key Stage 4, GCSE standards in both English Language and English Literature in 1999 were very high, well above the national average and above average for selective schools. 100 percent gained grade A* to C in English Language and the proportion gaining the highest grades in both examinations increased from previous years.

86. A-level results in 1999 were well above average for maintained schools. The proportion gaining the highest grades is significantly higher than the national figure. Almost half of the sixth form takes one of the two English courses at A-level. Results in media studies have improved in the two years of entries, but the relatively small number of students makes comparisons with national figures unreliable.

87. In 1999, standards in English at the end of Key Stage 3 national tests were very high compared with all maintained schools and well above the average for selective schools. Almost every student gained at least one grade higher than the national expectation. Results have risen steadily over the last four years. From lessons observed, in written work seen and in discussions with students, standards at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 are very high and well above average at sixth form level. Students' achievements are excellent at Key Stages 3 and 4 and they achieve very well in the sixth form.

88. At Key Stage 3, students' speaking and listening skills are excellent. They readily answer teachers' questions and formulate their own. They express and justify their opinions openly, discuss in class and in small groups, report back and evaluate their work. By the age of 16, students' oral skills are well developed in both formal and informal language. They listen carefully to others' points of view and negotiate agreements in group or pair work before presenting their ideas to the class. They respond very well to the strong emphasis in lessons on reading and oral work. In the sixth form, older students confront a wide range of texts critically, reading and analysing, for instance, poetry, pre-twentieth century prose, Chaucer and Shakespeare. A-level students comparing passages of dialogue were able to identify and discuss subtle differences in the speech patterns and codes of children and adults and also, using video material, of scripted and unscripted text. At all levels in the school, students are increasingly articulate and confident in their use of Standard English and this results from good oral activities led by sensitive teaching and skilful questioning.

89. Standards in reading at Key Stage 3, Key Stage 4 and the sixth form are very good. Literature is seen as a source of pleasure and also provides a good stimulus for the study of language and improvised drama. Students in Year 7 had fun interpreting Oscar Wilde's story of 'The Selfish Giant' in dramatic performances and planning ways in which the story could be filmed. In Year 9, 'Romeo and Juliet' was not only read very well, but gave rise to much discussion about romantic love, its joys and its problems. Close analysis of Chaucer's 'The Merchant's Prologue and Tale' stimulated an A-level group to consider Chaucer's ambivalent attitude to women and whether he, and perhaps Shakespeare, were feminists or misogynists. Students learn more sophisticated approaches to reading and analysing text as they progress through the school. Wider reading is supported by a well used, but small, library. During the week of the inspection, National Book Week, leading to World Book Day, was celebrated with reading activities including a book sale. Such activities confirm the importance and enjoyment of reading to the students.

90. Standards in writing are very good. At Key Stage 3, students are able to make notes and write for a range of purposes including letters, diaries, poems and autobiography. Their extended writing is very good, particularly when they improve their work with careful planning and drafting. The quality of written work for GCSE and A-level improves, underpinned by effective guidance from the teachers

through detailed, constructive comments on their work. There are examples of polished written responses for GCSE and A-level coursework from many of the highest attaining students where essays are coherently organised, incisive and accurate. A-level literature students show an impressive knowledge and interpretation of text. The combined language and literature A-level students produce imaginative work on a variety of topics including soap opera discourse, and the malice and justice in the language of 'Othello'. An examination of the media coverage of the Royal Opera House development made an interesting and original media studies project. Handwriting and presentation are usually very good at all stages and an increasing amount of work is immaculately word processed. However, a minority of students begin to struggle with the demanding A-level texts and their written work lacks detail and accuracy.

91. Students enter the school with high levels of competence in English and they make rapid progress as they move through the key stages, acquiring and consolidating their subject knowledge, skills and understanding. Students with special educational needs make very good progress in all aspects of their English work as a result of the attention and understanding they receive. Students who are especially gifted respond well when given more challenging tasks. As in the last inspection report, there is a tendency in a few lessons to regard all students in the class as if they were of the same ability. Opportunities are found outside the classroom to encourage students with a particular talent. A good example is the Young Writers' Workshop that meets fortnightly during a lunch break.

92. The standard in literacy across all subjects is good. The standard of oral work is particularly noteworthy. Students listen politely, are courteous and, in response to good teacher questioning and the school's emphasis on oral work in lessons, they become more self assured. Wide reading supports students' learning in most subjects and they are encouraged to read aloud in class and in assemblies. In addition, there is reading for information in the library, on the Internet and use of the media, experiences which develop independent research skills. There are good examples of writing for different purposes in all subjects; students are able to take notes, make lists, write letters and write in persuasive, informative and creative styles appropriate to the task. Much drafting is competent, especially when aided by the provision of clear guidance. However, where extended essays are required at A-level, for example in history, theatre studies, media studies and English, the quality of planning and drafting is inconsistent and has a marked negative effect on the finished work.

93. Students have an excellent and enthusiastic approach to their work, noted in the last inspection and still very much in evidence five years later. They like the subject and they have a good relationship with their teachers. They are highly motivated to succeed in examinations and other aspects of their work. They work productively in pairs and groups, and prepare work in advance of the lesson when required. Homework is a strength in English, especially written work following discussion and note taking in lessons. Students are generally very conscientious and learn to work independently away from school.

94. Overall, the quality of teaching is very good. Teachers set high standards, know their subject well and plan effectively for progression in the work. Whilst they have high expectations, they are also very reassuring and generous with their time in giving extra help or advice. Work is well planned and marked thoroughly. In the best lessons, there is rigour, enthusiasm, and an occasional dash of the unexpected. The attention of a Year 11 class was gripped when given a detail from a photograph of a young man. Students happily created in their minds a character full of life and ambition for the future. They were stunned when later they were shown his full photograph taken at a military hospital after the 1st World War - the young man and his friends had all lost their limbs. They were clearly moved as they turned to the poem, 'Disabled' by Wilfred Owen. It was an example of the power of teaching and poetry well taught.

95. Resources are used to best effect, and in classrooms and corridors there are attractive displays of students' work and details of writing competitions. Accommodation for teaching is generally good

although a temporary classroom is unsatisfactory, both in size and condition. The department lacks essential office space. The issue of computer use mentioned in the last inspection has been addressed and the teachers have worked hard on their training, sharing their expertise. Appropriate activities have been developed for all years. However, access to the information technology room is restricted and the department has no computers in their classrooms.

96. The management of the department is very effective with a good working handbook and clear directives on teaching, marking and examination requirements. There is a strong commitment to succeed and to improve. The department works as a team and responsibilities are shared. Much work is going into the development of media studies in the sixth form. Examination results are closely evaluated, though analysis and use of other data collected on students' achievements to assist in monitoring progress is still at an early stage. Closer links with primary schools is an area for development, particularly in relation to understanding literacy at Key Stage 2 and its development at Key Stage 3.

Drama

97. In 1999, results in GCSE drama were well above average for selective schools. The grades were very high; more than two thirds of the students gained a grade A* or A and all others gained B. A-level theatre studies results in 1999 were in line with maintained schools and over half gained grade A or B. The results at A-level have improved over the last three years. Boys and girls do equally well.

98. Attainment in lessons at Key Stage 3 is good. Since the last inspection, drama is taught as a discrete lesson each week in Years 7 and 8 and is merged within English in Year 9. Students invent and develop convincing and clearly worked out roles in situations which they create in groups. They show a good sense of audience and space although accommodation for their drama lessons is sometimes unsatisfactory.

99. In lessons, 16 year old students achieve well above average standards for their age. They demonstrate a good understanding of the basic techniques of drama and develop sequences of role play, improvisation and scripted performance which show a refined grasp of the dynamics of speech and movement. They work co-operatively, are highly self-critical, evaluating and improving their performances through practice.

100. In A-level theatre studies, performance is a strength and students achieve well. Boys who join the course in the sixth form make a very positive contribution. Work at this level extends students' understanding of drama to the context of the theatre. In an initial exploration of themes from Shakespeare's 'The Tempest', students were quick to identify performance difficulties involved in creating convincing magic and spirits on stage. They were also emotionally moved when listening to the voice of the late actor, Robert Stevens, reading blank verse from the same play. Some difficulties in literacy impede higher levels of attainment, for a few students, at A-level as the syllabus requires a considerable proportion of written coursework.

101. Students enjoy drama. It is a very popular subject. They have confidence that they will succeed as a result of the good facilities and challenging but supportive teaching. Gifted students have many opportunities to extend themselves, both in lessons and in the high standard of regular public performances staged by the school. Rehearsals taking place for a major performance of 'Millennium Mysteries', written and scored by the head of department, involve over a hundred students. This inspiring play and the many visits organised to the professional theatre are good examples of the excellent contribution made by this department to the rich cultural life of the school.

MATHEMATICS

102. The 1999 GCSE mathematics results were very high in comparison with national standards, below the average for similar schools and in line with the average for Kent Grammar schools. The number of A* to C grades has remained static over the past three years with the best results recorded in 1998 when all of the students entered achieved a grade A* to C in mathematics.

103. The students' results in the 1999 A-level examinations were above the national averages in terms of the number of A to E grades and the number of higher A and B grades.

104. The students' results in the 1999 national tests at the end of Key Stage 3 were very high in comparison with national standards, below the average for similar schools and in line with the average for Kent Grammar schools. The results have remained at a similar level over the past three years

105. On the basis of lessons observed and samples of work seen, standards at Key Stage 3 are very high in comparison with national averages and students' achievements are good. Students' number work is well developed, especially in Year 7, although there is some repetition of work already undertaken in the primary school. Students can identify transformations and draw loci although their graphical work is not so well developed. In a Year 8 lesson, students were taught how to carry out investigations and links with previous work on Pascal's Triangle were highlighted to aid their understanding of the assessment criteria. Students' ability to use and apply mathematics, in some classes, is not so well developed.

106. In lessons and work samples, standards at Key Stage 4 are very high in comparison with national averages and students achieve very well. Students show confidence in their number work, with and without the use of a calculator. They can identify angle properties of circles and solve harder trigonometric problems. In a Year 10 lesson, students were actively engaged in work on finding the surface area and volume of cones by making cones with fixed dimensions. This work consolidated their manipulative algebraic skills and supported their greater understanding. Standards in the sixth form are well above the national average with students taking A-levels in mathematics and further mathematics. Students achieve very well.

107. Students' attitudes to mathematics are very good and they display enthusiasm, determination and commitment to their studies. They behave very well in class and support one another in their understanding of the work. They enjoy good working relationships with each other and with their teacher, which contribute positively to their learning. A few students, however, lack confidence in their ability and give up too easily.

108. The quality of teaching throughout the department is good. This consistently good standard of teaching leads to students making good learning gains in Key Stage 3 and very good learning gains in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Teachers demonstrate good subject knowledge and have a good understanding of examination requirements, the topics to be covered and the resources to be used. Teachers' expectations are high, they manage their students well and mark work regularly. In a small number of lessons, the most able are not adequately challenged, the pace is too slow and teacher led activities predominate.

109. The subject curriculum meets statutory requirements and there is a good range of learning opportunities provided through the schemes of work. There is less evidence of work covering using and applying mathematics in Years 7 and 8. The present arrangements for students who take their GCSE examination a year early is unacceptable. The work does not sufficiently challenge students and the use of mathematics lessons for private study reduces the curriculum time in mathematics for this group of very able and very successful mathematicians and leads to some underachievement.

110. Extra-curricular activities are a particular strength of the department and students in all year groups take part in the national mathematics challenges and achieve creditable results, especially at the junior level with seventeen gold awards achieved last year. The department also sends Year 9 students to Saturday morning master classes and invites speakers to talk to sixth form students about career opportunities and the use of statistics in research. Support for individual students is also provided through regular departmental surgeries offered by staff during lunchtime and after school.

111. Students' literacy skills are sound and teachers actively encourage the precise use of vocabulary in their lessons although some poor spelling is noticeable in students' books and department displays. Students' capability in information technology is not sufficiently developed and provision is hampered by the lack of reliability of the present computer system. The department does make good use of graphical calculators and Year 9 students are provided with CD ROMs for revision purposes.

112. The department is effectively led and managed. Development planning is well considered and there is a clear vision and purpose which reflects the school aims and is shared by the rest of the department who work well together as a team. The head of department has a good awareness of what is going on in the department through a programme of monitoring.

113. The department has made sound progress in addressing the issues raised in the last report and inspection confirms that this is a strong department with knowledgeable and committed staff. There is a noticeable mathematical culture in lessons but teacher led activities still tend to predominate in a few lessons especially in the sixth form.

114. Students' numeracy skills are good although there is no whole school numeracy policy. At Key Stage 3, students make good use of number, graphs, models and diagrams in design and technology. They refine data and detect patterns in geography and make good use of number in modern foreign languages. At Key Stage 4, students demonstrate very good numeracy skills in geography using maps, cross sections and graphs and make good use of spreadsheets in economics to model investment appraisal. In a Year 11 information technology class, students drew straight line graphs from scientific data and used these to explore data relationships and check its validity. In the sixth form, they use indices, exponential graphs and differential/integral calculus in science.

SCIENCE

115. In 1999, all students were entered for GCSE Science, 41 percent being entered for triple science and 59 percent for double science. The percentage gaining A* -C was very high in comparison with the national average and high when compared to similar schools. All those entered for triple science gained A* -C grades, a large majority gaining A*-B. In comparison to their other subjects, students did well in science, particularly in physics. The high standards have been maintained over the last four years, with increasing numbers being entered for triple science.

116. A-level examination results in 1999 were well above national averages in all three sciences. Biology and Physics were well above national averages for A-C grades, whilst Chemistry was close to the national average. Overall performance in A-level has improved over the last four years.

117. In the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 national tests, students reached standards that were very high compared to the national average for all schools and above the national average for similar schools. Taken over the last four years, performance has been very high compared to the national average. The trend in the average point score has been broadly in line with the national average.

118. Students in the present Year 9 are achieving very high standards compared to the national expectation. This was illustrated in a lesson on dissolving, where students engaged in lively discussion about the way in which molecules behave when dissolving takes place and then planned an investigation on factors affecting how sugar dissolves in water. In Year 11, because of good teaching by subject specialists and an eagerness to learn on the part of the students, very high standards are maintained. This was illustrated in a lesson on step-up, step-down transformers. Students absorbed a lot of complex information, did calculations using the transformer equation and clearly enjoyed some spectacular demonstrations. At A-level, students demonstrated standards well above the national average. In all three sciences they produced written work of a high quality. Their work often showed imagination such as the mind maps Year 13 students had drawn up in biology as part of revision. Throughout all key stages, lessons are constructed to develop scientific skills in students. Students are enabled, through the marking of investigations, to develop the skills necessary for coursework and they achieve very well.

119. The great majority of students are interested in science, responding well to the teaching they receive. On the rare occasion when teaching shows lack of pace, students do their best to drive the pace themselves. In all lessons the attitude and behaviour of students is excellent. Students are very articulate. They respond very well to questions and ask searching questions, showing that they are intellectually curious. They are very enthusiastic about practical activities and work in an orderly and efficient manner.

120. The teaching observed during the inspection was very good overall. It ranged from satisfactory to excellent, but a high proportion was good or better. The quality in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form was very good whilst that at Key Stage 4 was good. The strengths of the teaching in Key Stages 3 and the sixth form lay in the variety of methods used within the lessons to keep students working, enabling all students to make very good learning gains. Apart from this, teaching has many clear strengths which help students to learn: very good subject knowledge and understanding of the requirements of the National Curriculum and examination courses; excellent planning based on clearly laid out schemes of work; excellent collection and use of national and school data to track individual students; very good classroom management with prompt starts to lessons and equipment/resources to hand; very high expectations from the teachers leading to an atmosphere conducive to learning. The few weaknesses observed that occasionally slowed the pace of learning included too much copying from the whiteboard or oral dictation, unnecessary repetition of points by the teacher and points contributed to discussion not always heard by the whole class.

121. The department is very well led and managed at all levels. The head of department maintains an excellent database of test and examination results and uses it effectively to promote high standards. The department uses the data, together with professional opinion, to set examination targets each year and is on line to meet those set for 2000. A subject mentoring system at A-level has helped to improve overall results in recent years. The department uses information technology at all levels. An excellent use of software created by a member of staff was seen in Year 10 to demonstrate the three-dimensional structure of molecules. Year 10 and Year 12 students have made some impressive PowerPoint presentations on the periodic table and cell biology. Information technology is also used with data logging equipment and helpful Websites are accessed via the Internet. This is a noticeable improvement since the last inspection. The departmental development plan is in line with that of the whole school and identifies information technology as the main area for further development.

122. The science department has had some laboratories refurbished since the last inspection and has improved the preparation areas for the technicians. The technical support is now adequate and the service provided by the team is excellent, especially since the laboratories are in use for 80 percent of the week. This is an improvement since the last inspection but there are still some laboratories that need attention.

ART

123. In the most recent GCSE examinations, the percentage of students who gained A*-C grades was well above the national average and well above the average when compared with similar schools. In recent years, the number of A* and A grades has increased and is very high when compared with the results of other selective schools. The results in the A-level examinations in the most recent examinations were above average. High standards in examinations have been maintained.

124. Based on the work seen in classes and from discussions with students, standards are well above expectation in Key Stage 3 and 4. Students achieve very well and make very good progress. In all years, books and computers are used for research and to gather information about the work of artists and designers. Students read widely and express themselves fluently. Standards of research and the quality of investigation in sketchbooks are particularly high. For example students in Year 8, before preparing their own self portrait or family group, made a study of The Ambassadors by Holbein. Their knowledge of 16th century European history helped them place this painting in its historical and cultural setting. They noted the way the figures were posed, the various objects placed alongside them and made thoughtful and accurate observations on their possible meaning and significance. These students were very well prepared, both for making their own paintings and also for a planned visit to the National Gallery later in the term. Year 11 students, preparing for the controlled test, worked confidently and could explore ideas by combining high standards of technical skill with imaginative and creative responses to the questions.

125. In A-level classes standards overall are above average, students achieve very well and progress is sound. The standard of drawing in Year 12 is a strength but the quality of painting in Years 12 and 13 is more variable and, in some cases, does not show the same intellectual rigor. Students' portfolios contain a good range of high quality work, including life drawing, photography and mixed media work. The department has a very high rate of success in getting students accepted onto courses in higher education.

126. The quality of teaching and learning is very good with aspects of excellence. Teachers' expectations, their subject expertise and their ability to inspire and motivate are all excellent. Students enjoy the subject, produce a lot of high quality work in lessons and for homework and show considerable powers of concentration and personal commitment. Teaching is very effective in developing and encouraging independent learning and critical appraisal. By carefully selecting artists, whose work enables students to explore and recognise connections between different subjects and themes, teachers help students acquire a deepening knowledge and understanding of the role of artists in different societies. Students also receive excellent guidance and coaching in the development of technical and expressive skills. They are taught how to use different materials by adding to a growing repertoire of skills and experiences that they are able to use and adapt independently. In a Year 10 lesson students were asked to use charcoal to draw their self-portraits. They began, with some reluctance, to make the first hesitant marks but by the end of the lesson were making bold strokes, working on a large scale and producing work of very high quality. What students had learnt about tonal relationships, cast shadows and the benefits of persistence provided the basis for greater success and personal achievement in future work. The purpose of the lesson was explained and understood by the whole class. Teaching was less effective where students were unclear about the short-term objectives and how they related to longer-term aims, as occasionally happened in some Key Stage 3 lessons. Students have excellent attitudes to learning. They are hard working, and very keen to do well.

127. Management is good. All teachers have a shared commitment to raise achievement. Standards have improved since the last inspection. Policy documents, curriculum planning and assessment materials are reviewed regularly alongside students' work. The next task is to plan and assess students' work against National Curriculum levels and to ensure teachers and students have the information they

need to track progress. Considerable staff training has taken place to develop the necessary expertise for including computer generated imagery in the curriculum but, whilst some students have examples in their portfolios, most do not. This aspect of whole school development needs to have a greater impact on teaching and learning in the future. The points for action mentioned in the previous inspection have been addressed. There has been good improvement since the last inspection.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

128. The 1999 GCSE examination results show that all students passed food technology, textiles and resistant materials at A*-C grades, with almost all achieving A*-C grades in graphic products. The 1998 results were similar. Results are well above all maintained secondary schools and above all selective schools. At A-level, students achieved 100 percent pass rate at A-E grades with a 72 percent success rate at A-C grades. Low entries make national comparisons difficult.

129. Current standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are well above the national expectation and match recent teacher assessments. Similar results were achieved in 1998. In students' design folders, the work shows a range of good and often very good graphical skills, research and analysis. The best folders show a variety of presentational skills using colour, shading techniques, commercial material, photographs and information technology to illustrate the work. Where folders do not reach these high standards, there is a weakness in developing initial ideas, some shallow research and presentation lacks neatness both in graphics and writing. Practical skills are well developed and students' achievements are often very good.

130. Current standards at the end of Key Stage 4 are well above average across all areas of the department. Students can express ideas in a range of media using a variety of presentational skills to illustrate their work. Design work shows a depth of research, good analysis and thoughtful evaluation. The work includes a wide range of drawing techniques and the appropriate use of information technology, including research from the Internet. Only rarely do the folders not meet these high standards. Practical work shows a variety of approaches to problem solving and students use a range of tools and equipment safely and confidently to arrive at a solution. Achievement is often very good and students make good progress in the lessons.

131. Standards in the sixth form are good both in design work and practical assignments and students achieve well. Design folders include good research, investigation and analysis and a range of presentation and drawing techniques. Students' practical work shows a range of well developed design solutions, and the effective use of various materials. The case studies show a good range of investigations using a variety of research methods and practical skills.

132. The quality of teaching is satisfactory in Key Stage 4 and good in Key Stage 3 and the sixth form. In the best lessons, teachers had clear objectives, used effective questions to reinforce learning and understanding, and ensured that time was used effectively. These positive features were seen in a number of Key Stage 3 lessons and resulted in students making good learning gains. Very good learning was seen in a Year 9 textiles lesson where students were investigating and experimenting with different decorative techniques such as appliqué, quilting, patchwork and embroidery. Lesson objectives were clear, exemplar material effectively used and the lesson taught at a brisk pace.

133. In the sixth form, good teaching was seen in a theory lesson involving joining of metals using soldering and welding techniques. Students made good learning gains as a result of effective teaching and their strong desire to learn. Satisfactory lessons sometimes lacked sufficient vigour and pace, and teachers' expectations were not always made explicit. Learning, however, was still good.

134. Students' attitudes to learning are very good at all key stages. Application to learning is very good and behaviour is almost always very good with only the occasional distraction. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, students can work independently and engage in research activities in a responsible manner. Relationships are always very good. They work well in pairs or groups and listen to each other and share ideas.

135. Key Stage 3 students are aware of how well they are performing, and helpful marking helps them identify how they should improve. Student record cards are used to record attainment and progress, and used as a map of progress for each student at this key stage. Self-assessment is also in place and students asked to comment constructively on their work. At Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form, teacher's marking is detailed and shows students how to improve.

136. The curriculum offers a broad course at Key Stage 3 covering the programmes of study in line with National Curriculum requirements. Statutory requirements are not being met at Key Stage 4 as all students do not take a technology subject. Accommodation is good overall but storage facilities are restricted for coursework and some materials. Resources are adequate but there are shortcomings in some areas. There are limited facilities and resources for some aspects of the Key Stage 3 programme, such as control technology and structures. Aspects of computer-aided design and manufacture are currently underdeveloped. However, equipment to support this aspect of the curriculum has been ordered and will be installed for the start of the new academic year. A part-time technician gives valuable support to the department.

137. Management of the department is satisfactory with good documentation giving clear guidelines on policies and practices. The department works well as a team and share responsibilities for certain areas of work and practice. Monitoring procedures are in place, but further development is needed to include more rigorous assessment of standards across the department and ensuring that procedures are followed consistently in all areas.

138. A good range of improvements have been implemented since the last inspection. There is now a broader course of study at Key Stage 3, which places appropriate emphasis on resistant materials and the development of three-dimensional drawing skills. Information technology facilities have been improved and there have been improvements in accommodation, particularly for teaching which uses resistant materials.

GEOGRAPHY

139. GCSE results have improved since the time of the previous report and in 1999 were very high when compared with the national average for all schools and above those of similar schools. All students achieved a grade in the range A*-C and two-thirds achieved grades A* and A, which was well above the school mean. Currently, standards and achievement in Year 11 are very high.

140. Results in the A-level examinations in 1999 were broadly in line with national expectations, all students achieved grades in the range A-E but the proportion achieving the higher grades A and B was well below the average for all schools. These results fell well below the school average. Students failed to make the progress expected of them at this stage and achievement was unsatisfactory. However, because of some excellent teaching, current standards are well above the expected level. Students in Year 13 have attained very good results in the modules tested and achievement is good. Written work is of a very high standard, essays are most often structured well, precise and lucid, conclusions being substantiated by well-chosen evidence and examples.

141. Standards at Key Stage 3, have improved over the last three years, and are very high. Students make very good progress, and achievement is very good indeed. Standards of work in lessons are well above the expected level. The progress made by students with special needs is very good and high attaining students have the opportunity to achieve their full potential. Students' work is accurate, well presented and they have a very good knowledge and understanding of the places, themes and processes studied, including an appreciation of the inter-relationships between human and physical processes.

142. The quality of teaching and learning at Key Stages 3 and 4 is very good. The teaching and learning at A-level is excellent. There were examples of inspirational teaching as when a group of Year 12 students was introduced to the topic 'Pollution'; the teacher drew on the existing knowledge of the students to build an overview of the topic. The tempo at which the lesson was conducted was brisk, the demands of the teacher were challenging, the resources selected and the appropriate tasks combined in an experience which resulted in excellent progress. The teaching is strong in all respects, however, particularly noteworthy is the thorough planning which underpins the progression and continuity in the learning, the teachers' knowledge and understanding, their management of students and high expectations of them. Teachers employ a variety of techniques although the small classrooms present difficulties. In a lesson with Year 7, students played roles in solving a crime while developing their map skills in using direction, scale and grid references to trace routes. Through the teaching, students develop the skills necessary for independent learning which allows them to take an increasing responsibility for their studies as they move through the school. The students, who make frequent and accurate use of technical terms in responding to very demanding questioning, are able to pose their own focused geographical questions. The imaginative range of tasks used match the students' needs. Group work is used effectively and selectively, students are able to collaborate in making decisions and presenting their findings. Teachers make very good use of homework. Students' work is marked promptly and carefully. The very good assessment information held by teachers is being used increasingly to set targets and monitor progress.

143. Students' attitudes to learning are excellent. They are willing and tractable, their behaviour in lessons was faultless. They were almost always very interested and frequently enthusiastic. The relationships between students and teachers are excellent.

144. The range of techniques and activities used ensure that the department makes a very good contribution to the development of students' literacy skills. Numerical skills are also given appropriate importance. Skills in measurement, the use of co-ordinates and the appreciation of scale, themes and processes, are well developed. Students have good information technology skills and these are being increasingly applied in the learning, for example in Year 9 all students complete the information technology project "Global Quality of Life". The use of digital cameras and the Internet in the teaching are being developed. Information handling and word processing is frequently used.

145. The management of the subject is a further strength and contributes significantly to the quality of teaching and learning. All aspects of organisation and administration are effective, and the management of the curriculum is particularly good reflecting, as it does, the systematic evaluation of the teaching and learning. The schemes of work are of a very high quality and appropriate importance is attached to geographical enquiry. The students have very good access to fieldwork at all stages. Much of the limited space available in the classrooms is taken up with storage and the lack of a departmental office causes difficulties. The staffing of the department is a considerable strength.

146. Since the time of the last report further improvements have been achieved in standards and the quality of teaching and learning. All issues identified in the previous inspection have been addressed. The department has both the commitment and capacity necessary to achieve further improvement.

HISTORY

147. In 1999, GCSE history results were higher than in almost all other subjects in the school, above those for similar schools and very high when set against the national average for all schools. Standards at this level have improved over the past three years. In lessons standards are also very high, students use terms and conventions accurately, can assess the significance of events and have a very good appreciation of the links within and between periods. The achievement of students is excellent. There is ample opportunity for students to advance the skills learned in the previous key stage. Those with special needs make very good progress at both Key Stages 3 and 4 and high attaining students are able to achieve their potential.

148. All students achieved pass grades at A-level in 1999, although not enough achieved the highest grades. There was variation in the standards of students' work in the two lessons seen. In a lesson on the reign of Edward VI the students provided accurate answers which were supported by appropriate evidence as an overview of the period was developed and good progress made. However, in another lesson, on the foreign policy of Henry VII, the pitch and pace of the lesson contributed little to their learning. Unsatisfactory teaching resulted because the teacher's knowledge was not sufficiently secure. The essays of a few students are often insufficiently well structured and lucid.

149. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are very high compared with national expectations and have improved since the time of the last report. All students achieve very well in relation to their prior learning. Students' work is accurate, detailed and well presented, it reflects their very high levels of knowledge and understanding of the people, events and changes in the areas of study covered. They develop the skills required in each of the key elements, for example their understanding of chronology and cause and effect are outstanding, as is their ability to evaluate sources.

150. The quality of teaching makes a substantial contribution to the development of literacy skills at Key Stages 3 and 4. A good variety of tasks are set which allow students to practice different forms of writing used in addressing different purposes and audiences. Some, but not all, teachers make appropriate corrections to spelling, punctuation and grammar. Reading is encouraged and students are required to prepare and deliver presentations in classes. Opportunities for the students to practice their numerical skills are limited. The use made of information technology in the delivery of the subject is unsatisfactory, but the department is aware of this and training is being undertaken.

151. Overall the quality of teaching and learning is good. It is very good in Key Stages 3 and 4, where lessons ranged from good to excellent. Students learning progressed as a result of lessons which were planned conscientiously, learning objectives were made clear, the resources and activities challenged yet matched their needs and homework was used to good effect. For example, in a lesson on the Treaty of Versailles, students were encouraged to apply their existing knowledge and understanding in determining the motives of the world leaders present. They were able to make very perceptive observations on which to base their decisions and made excellent progress in advancing their understanding of links with events of future years. A much wider range of teaching techniques is used than at the time of the previous report, for example there is adequate opportunity for students to learn through discussing topics. The students are able to rehearse and consolidate their learning through the very good questioning techniques teacher's use. The lessons observed in the sixth form ranged from very good to unsatisfactory. In the lesson which had weaknesses this was due to a lack of subject knowledge and insufficient pace.

152. The quality of ongoing assessment is variable and some teacher comments are untidy and difficult to read. Students understand the system of grades applied but not all teachers give the type of information that can support improvement and too few targets are set.

153. Students show interest and enthusiasm for the subject at all stages. They work conscientiously and are able to sustain their concentration. Behaviour was exemplary in almost all lessons, the teachers having very good pupil management skills. Classrooms were calm and orderly with an atmosphere conducive to learning. The contributions made in lessons are valued and students feel supported in their learning.

154. Overall the management of the department is effective and the team work well together. The monitoring of teaching should be more rigorously applied in the sixth form in order to identify strengths and weaknesses and improve standards. The department has no office where they are able to meet and work together, however, they make good use of the two designated rooms which contain very attractive and informative displays of students' work. Curriculum planning is thorough, schemes of work give detailed guidance and this underpins the very good quality of teaching and learning which takes place at Key Stages 3 and 4. The department has the commitment and capacity for further improvement.

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

155. Standards at the end of Key Stages 3 and 4 in 1999 were well above national expectations for all schools and students achieve very well. In the 1999 GCSE examinations, all students entered achieved grades A*-C and 75 percent achieved the highest grades of A* and A, well above national averages. Current GCSE students in Year 11 are attaining equally well. These results represent an outstanding improvement to the standards noted in the last inspection, and a huge increase in the highest grades of A* and A. A new AS-level course has been introduced in the sixth form.

156. In the 1999 end of Key Stage 3 teachers' assessments, the percentage of students reaching level 5 or above was well above national expectation for girls and in line with similar schools. This shows a small but steady rise since the last inspection. Although specific lesson time is limited for the majority of students from Years 8 to 11, an increasing number have home computers and this has a positive impact on standards achieved.

157. Current standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are above national expectations. This is evident from both the lessons observed and coursework. Although students have not had specific information technology lessons in Years 8 and 9, they attain proficiency by using a range of software packages in a number of subjects, such as science and geography. All students, including those with special needs, use information technology to solve a variety of problems. They develop good skills and use equipment safely. The specific information technology lessons in Year 7 provide a sound basis for applying skills in other subjects. Students use desktop publishing for an English project. They learn to use spreadsheets, and in a very good lesson seen, students used 'Logo' to write programs to draw polygons applying algebraic formulae for a mathematics project. In other subjects, information technology is well used in a number of lessons, for example, in modern foreign languages. It is particularly well used in science in Years 8 and 9. Students use data logging skills well to record their own investigations.

158. In a good Year 10 science lesson, the teacher projected three-dimensional structural models of rotating molecules and carbon chains, from a visually exciting program. In Year 11, students in physics lessons measure acceleration due to gravity with light gates attached to laptop computers. In a very good French lesson, students produced attractive, well-designed posters advertising ferry travel using desktop publishing to import scanned digital photographs. In mathematics lessons, students use graphical calculators well, and in advanced level music technology lessons, students use new software very effectively to compose. In several subjects, such as economics, design and technology and religious education students make appropriate use of the Internet for research. Lack of access to resources and the unreliability of the new network limit skills development in some subjects such as English where the majority of students word process essays at home.

159. Although information technology has yet to have a full impact in some subjects, there has been considerable improvement since the last inspection when standards were variable and there was underachievement in a third of lessons. Students are now more critical in their use of information technology and have a deeper understanding of concepts. Opportunities in most subjects are better although some problems with access to equipment still exist. By the end of Key Stage 4 students attain competence in the various applications. Some continue developing their skills towards a full GCSE certificate. The majority of students now demonstrate good achievement and those opting for GCSE are fluent and autonomous users of a variety of packages.

160. The quality of teaching is good in Key Stages 3 and 4. Teaching in the small number of sixth form lessons seen was very good. Good relationships between teachers and students foster attitudes to learning that are generally very good at all key stages for students, including those with special needs. The very positive attitudes shown in Year 7 are maintained by most students through to the end of Key Stage 4. A minority of students on non-examination courses are less motivated and come off task from time to time. This happens when the teaching is less effective and work involves note taking rather than an active response. Teaching is sometimes adversely affected by a cramped room in which it is difficult to move around large classes. Overall, behaviour is good in Key Stage 4 non-examination lessons and very good in all other lessons seen. Students concentrate very well on their tasks, co-operate very well both with each other and their teachers, and demonstrate mature attitudes to their work.

161. Teachers ensure that students are clearly aware of the tasks they have to do and the progress they are making, particularly in GCSE and sixth form lessons. More able students are often encouraged to try out more advanced routines while they wait for teachers to help slower students. Teachers generally support individuals well and homework is set when required. Overall, students made good learning gains in lessons seen, and good progress over time. The good learning in Year 7 lessons is maintained through Key Stage 3 and many students use their own initiative and develop good independent study skills, well supported by parents.

162. Teachers generally assess and monitor students' standards of work and progress well in Key Stage 3. At Key Stage 4 monitoring of students' work across the curriculum is satisfactory. In GCSE classes, assessment procedures meet examination requirements so that teachers can ensure students precisely meet criteria. Courses are well planned and structured. To aid progression, a new AS-level course has been successfully introduced in the sixth form. Teachers in other subject areas are developing expertise to extend students' capability, particularly in Key Stage 4.

163. The department is well managed on a day-to-day basis by experienced teachers who maintain a good, co-operative working ethos. Accommodation is well-maintained and safe, although the recently converted rooms are too cramped for larger classes. Maintenance of equipment is good especially as several old machines need replacement. The newly-installed network is causing some technical problems that sometimes affect achievement. The number of computers available to students is in line with national averages, but access for some subjects during lesson time is difficult. A good selection of software is available. The school has submitted a successful bid to join the national grid for learning. Recent additions to computers and good quality technical support mean that the school is well placed to improve further.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

French

164. At the end of Key Stage 3, standards are well above the national average. GCSE results in 1999 were above the national average for similar schools. However, the number of students attaining grades

A* - A was below both the national and the school's average. A-level results were similar in that the number of students attaining grades A and B was well below both the school and the national average.

165. Standards in the current Year 9 are above the national expectation. Students contribute willingly to oral work in class and listen attentively and effectively to their teachers and to recorded material. They read with good understanding, though largely from course book texts, and their written work is competent, though generally not very creative. Their potential in writing was better illustrated by occasional examples of very good work produced on computer which included poems. In the current Year 11, standards are well above the average expected at this stage of the course. Students' listening and speaking skills are well developed, but their reading and writing are very much geared to examination syllabuses and are consequently rather restricted in scope. Current standards in the sixth form are above average, students listen to and read complex texts and can converse freely on topics such as the legalisation of drugs. In Year 12 their written work is of high quality, dealing with a range of social, political and cultural themes.

German

166. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are above the national average. GCSE results in 1999 were above the national average for similar schools, though, as with French, the number of students achieving grades A* - A was below national and school averages. There have been fluctuations in German results in recent years - in 1998, for example, the GCSE pass rate at grades A* - C was only 87 percent compared to a six-year average of 93.5 percent. The single A-level candidate in 1999 achieved grade B.

167. Because of the absence of the head of German during the inspection week, it was only possible to inspect German in Years 7, 10, 11 and 12. Year 7 beginners have made rapid progress and show well-developed listening skills, a good grasp of a range of vocabulary on personal information and preferences and a willingness to answer questions. However, their answers, like much of the written work seen at Key Stage 3, tended to be based on individual sentences rather than extended combinations of ideas. At Key Stage 4, extended speech and writing are better, though students need encouragement to be more enterprising and creative in their use of language. Achievement in the sixth form is good. Students tackle literary texts with growing confidence and produce good extended personal writing. They read a large amount of contemporary source material, including items accessed via the Internet.

Spanish

168. Standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are above the national average. GCSE results in 1999 were above the national average for similar schools, though the proportion of students achieving grades A* - A and their average point score were lower than French and German. All four A-level candidates achieved pass grades, though none was higher than C.

169. Current standards at Key Stage 3 are above average. However, in both speaking and writing, there is more emphasis on the workings of the language than on its application in interesting contexts for students' own purposes. Their listening skills develop well, but there was little evidence of their reading material beyond the course book. In the current Year 11, there are indications that results will be better than last year's. In lessons, students speak willingly in response to questions and in structured dialogue, but are less willing to use Spanish spontaneously. Their listening skills are satisfactory. There is evidence of more extensive reading at this level, including contemporary magazine texts. Written work is well presented and is more creative and imaginative than that seen in other languages. Sixth form students are achieving good standards, suggesting improvement in results at this level. They listen with good understanding to challenging extracts of spoken Spanish. Their own spoken work is of variable

quality - Year 13 students showed a surprising reluctance to express themselves, whereas those in Year 12 could debate topics such as the legalisation of drugs. Students read a good range of literary and contemporary texts, including material obtained via the Internet. Their written work tends to be dominated by grammar practice.

All languages

170. Teachers' assessments at the end of Key Stage 3 indicate performance well above the national average. This was not supported by evidence seen during the inspection, which indicated standards above the national average. GCSE results in all languages are above the national average for similar schools and broadly in line with school averages. They are below both school and national averages in the number of students achieving grades A* - A. A-level results are below both school and national averages, again notably in the number attaining the highest grades. The department must thus address the issue of raising standards at the higher levels of attainment.

171. Students' achievement at Key Stage 3 is based on satisfactory rather than significant progress. Their listening, reading and writing skills are good (though there is insufficient extended and creative writing across the key stage). Their speaking too often consists of short responses to questions or performance of set-piece dialogue. They show insufficient initiative and spontaneity in using language for their own purposes. Achievement at Key Stage 4 is satisfactory. Particularly good examples of independent listening and writing were seen in French, and there was good oral response in Spanish. However, there is evidence of underachievement in a few lessons, when students give only short spoken answers or engage in banal tasks with no real point. Overall, achievement in the sixth form is good. Good achievement was seen in all three languages, notably in Year 12. Students are capable of extended speech and respond well to a good range of texts on literary, historical and contemporary social and cultural topics.

172. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory overall. Almost all lessons were satisfactory and teaching was good or very good in under a half. Strengths in teaching are the high level of personal skill of all staff and lessons which have clear objectives, are conducted at a brisk pace and provide students with the support they need to perform tasks and activities successfully. A particularly good example was seen in a Year 10 French lesson where students used information technology to produce a poster on the best method of crossing the Channel. The teacher's information technology and language-teaching skills gave students the confidence to produce some very good work. Where teaching had weaknesses, it was characterised by slow pace and excessive use of English. Tasks were not sufficiently well planned to enable students to succeed. In some instances, too much time is spent talking to students through exposition or questions, which only require short answers, rather than developing students' all round confidence as language users.

173. Students are enthusiastic and committed learners: they respond willingly in lessons and work very well both in pairs and independently. They are able to concentrate and maintain their efforts throughout lessons, the majority of which are of above-average length for languages. Sixth form students have a mature and focused attitude and are very well motivated.

174. The languages curriculum is well planned, particularly in terms of the relationship between first and second languages. Schemes of work are in place, but need further development. Objectives are not sufficiently clearly defined, assessment is not integrated and there is insufficient cross-referencing to National Curriculum programmes of study. Schemes are not produced to a common format. These weaknesses contribute to the lack of consistency in teaching. There is excellent extra-curricular provision in all languages through the programme of visits and exchanges.

175. The head of department has been effective in building a good team structure in the department and shows good awareness of key issues. Management has not been sufficiently directive in terms of either development planning or raising standards. Current development planning is insufficiently focused on raising standards and improving the quality and consistency of teaching. Monitoring of teaching has not been sufficiently rigorous. These weaknesses limit the department's capacity to improve teaching and raise standards.

176. Since the previous inspection, there have been improvements in the teaching of cultural aspects of languages, in National Curriculum assessment, in the use of information technology and in the planning of the curriculum for students' progress in their first and second language. Provision in the sixth form has been extended by a good general studies Italian course. Accommodation has improved significantly. However, in the crucial areas of standards and the quality of teaching there has been insufficient improvement.

MUSIC

177. In 1999 75 percent of students gained A*-C grades. The relatively small numbers taking this option make it difficult to make national comparisons. Standards attained by students in Key Stage 4 both in their lessons and written work are high. This is an improvement since the time of the last inspection. Students' achievements are particularly good in composing, performing and analytical work. Standards are similarly high at A-level, although the number of students is too small to make national comparisons. A new music technology A-level course is being run for eight Year 13 students, including students from a local boys' grammar school. At their best, the standards in a range of studio techniques by the students are very good, but a few students are lagging behind in the production of their portfolios of compositions. Overall, students' achievements in the sixth form are very good.

178. At the end of Key Stage 3, students' achievements are satisfactory. Standards in performing, composing, listening and appraising are in line with national expectations. In Years 7 and 8, students are attaining at a higher level in all aspects of the music curriculum due to improvements in teaching and curriculum planning.

179. A significant number of students across all key stages participate in a substantial range of high quality extra-curricular musical activities. 126 students - more than eleven percent - regularly prepare for graded practical and theory examinations, taught by qualified and committed peripatetic teachers from the Kent Music School service. There is a long tradition of providing high-quality performance opportunities for the students, which successfully balances the philosophy of "music for all" alongside commitment to stretching very able and gifted performers. All these activities have a positive impact on the standard of music in the school.

180. The quality of learning is very good throughout all key stages, with the exception of Year 9, where it is satisfactory. Attitudes to learning are almost invariably very positive. Students enjoy working together in practical activities and generally make very good progress over time. The small numbers of students with special educational needs are well integrated into their groups, and their progress, achievement and learning are in line with those of other students.

181. The quality of teaching is very good overall, and sometimes outstanding, particularly at Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. Lessons are always well planned, challenging and stimulating, and very good relationships have been established between students and teachers. Staff show a high level of commitment and expertise across a wide range of musical disciplines in supporting students during and outside lessons, often devoting a great deal of time to working with individual students before and after school, and during breaks and lunchhours. Musically gifted students are encouraged to organise and

run music clubs, give recitals and to perform in assembly. However, there is room for further development in the provision of differentiated materials and opportunities for students to perform on their orchestral instruments in class.

182. The department is very well managed. Points for action at the last inspection with regard to the need to review accommodation and resourcing provision have all been appropriately addressed and resolved. There is now a good supply of textbooks for GCSE and A-level analytical project work, and increased provision of suitable course materials for Key Stage 3 students. Broken classroom instruments have been repaired and lower pitched percussion instruments purchased. Problems of inadequate soundproofing have been resolved. However, there are still limitations in the layout of one of the music classrooms, which is affecting the quality of learning for some students. Information technology provision across the curriculum was a key issue at the last inspection. In music, significant progress has been made, notably in the development of the new A-level in music technology, with investment in a very good range of state-of-the art equipment, which is occasionally used by students from other years. Software is also available in the library and the department has theory software for pupil use.

183. In addition, the department handbook has been effectively re-written and development targets set to improve the quality of classroom music, particularly within Key Stage 3. There is now a comprehensive and systematic pupil profiling and assessment system which is used to inform curricular planning and delivery. This has already had a positive effect on the quality of standards, particularly in Years 7 and 8. The department is committed to a range of further improvements, including development of the pupil profiling system and continued development of information technology. Overall, this is a very good department. There has been very good improvement since the last inspection and there is the capacity and commitment to improve still further.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

184. GCSE results in 1999 were disappointing with 75 percent of students gaining A*-C. In 1998 all the students entered gained A*-C which was excellent. However, in view of the relatively small numbers taking this option so far in the last three years, it is difficult to make national comparisons. The standards attained by students in Key Stage 4 in the lessons seen were above average. Judging from matches, practise sessions and county and national representation many students achieve standards which are well above the national average, particularly in hockey and netball. In the sixth form standards vary but are generally above or well above average. Team players in netball in particular were seen to have above or well above average standards. It is not possible to compare A-level results with national standards as the present Year 13 cohort will be the first to sit the examination.

185. The standards achieved by students in Key Stage 3 in all the activities seen were above national expectations. Some students achieve very high standards in hockey and netball. School teams have recently had notable successes in county tournaments. Overall standards throughout the school are above average, and in lessons the students achieve very well.

186. Teaching in all the lessons seen was good or better. In just over six out of ten lessons it was excellent. This was clearly reflected in the excellent quality of learning opportunities presented to the students and the high standards achieved. All the lessons were well planned to make very good use of progressive practices which enabled students to achieve well. Lesson structure across the department was consistent and featured very good pace, challenge and high expectations. Lessons included opportunities for students to plan and evaluate their work as well as perform and this is an improvement since the previous inspection. Few lessons, however, gave opportunities for students to

take responsibility for leading a part of the lesson, for example the warm-up or cool down sections. Differentiated tasks for both the less able and the more skilled students were used and this, together with setting students in their double lessons in Key Stage 3, ensured that students of all abilities were able to make excellent progress. The teachers' excellent knowledge and understanding of a wide range of activities is also a major factor in the excellent learning gains made by students.

187. Students' attitudes to physical education were excellent. They often changed for their lessons during break or lunchtimes so time in the lesson was used to the full. The few non-participants in lessons took part fully and seriously in consulting with groups, evaluating their work or umpiring games. These very responsive attitudes contributed greatly to the students' ability to achieve very well.

188. The very high quality of leadership and management of this department is a major strength. The leadership is clear thinking and objective and has produced a consistency of approach across the department which is reflected in the improvements made since the previous inspection. There is very good, systematic monitoring of teaching which ensures that all the students receive similar experiences and have equality of both opportunity and access. Enthusiasm for the subject coupled with high expectations are an inspiration for the department and the students.

189. An imbalance of provision noted in the last report has been addressed so that greater opportunities for progress are now offered in the aesthetic activities of gymnastics and dance in Key Stage 3. Assessment opportunities are integrated within the schemes of work. The assessment procedures are very effective and give a very good record of achievement and progress. These two points represent a very good level of improvement since the previous inspection.

190. A very good range of extra-curricular sport is offered which enhances the curriculum provision. It gives opportunities for students to make further progress as well as to achieve excellence.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

191. Examination results at Key Stage 4 are consistently well above the national average and in line with similar schools. Of the eighteen students entered for GCSE in 1999, ten gained A* or A grades. In the sixth form standards are similarly high. Nine students were entered for A-level in 1999, seven gained grades A or B.

192. By the end of Key Stage 3, students' achievements are very good and they are competent in all three attainment targets of the Kent Agreed Syllabus. They have sound knowledge of aspects of the six principal religions in Great Britain, particularly Christianity. They are able to find, select, organise and present information well in their annual projects, such as the Year 9 project on Jewish Passover when students worked in groups and produced posters. They have good understanding of religions, particularly religious symbolism, which is explored from the beginning of Year 7. They are able to evaluate religious and moral issues and to express their own ideas orally and in essays. They are able to apply religious insights to their own lives, as in their response to the question: "Is death a wall or a door?"

193. By the end of Key Stage 4, GCSE students demonstrate high level skills in knowledge, understanding and evaluation of religion. They have developed detailed knowledge and understanding of Christian perspectives on social and personal issues and on the religion of Islam. They have very good evaluative skills. Non-examination students are also able to explain religious concepts, such as Christian love, and to apply their learning to themselves. During the key stage, students' achievements are very good. A-level students are able to research from a wide range of books and to produce detailed analysis for their coursework. In class, they discuss with knowledge and understanding, making good

use of religious vocabulary, such as Arabic terms in the study of Islam and they achieve very well. By contrast, sixth form students who follow a general studies course in religious education are not being challenged sufficiently and their standards of work are not as high as they should be.

194. Students' behaviour in all lessons is excellent. They listen attentively to the teacher, are courteous to each other in discussions and work well together in groups. They settle quickly to their tasks and sustain concentration. They work hard, particularly for homework and project work. They enjoy opportunities for creative work such as producing music and movement to express the meaning of the Lord's Prayer in Year 8. The good relationships that exist in lessons are particularly important in religious education because students can be open about their own views, feelings and personal experiences, knowing that they will be treated with respect.

195. Teaching and learning throughout the school are very good. All lessons are carefully planned with clear learning outcomes for the students to achieve. Marking helps students to see where they can improve. Lessons are well prepared, with a range of resources and activities to maintain interest. The teachers in this department are all specialists who draw on their subject knowledge and understanding to answer students' questions and explain ideas carefully. This helps students to deepen their own knowledge and understanding of religions. Teachers encourage students to express their own ideas, both in class discussion and in essays, which results in high achievement. A little more emphasis on the application of religious insights into students' own lives would be helpful at Key Stage 3.

196. The department is well managed, with clear policies which are monitored by the head of department. Assessment, recording and reporting is carefully organised according to the Agreed Syllabus attainment targets and public examination objectives. There have been improvements since the last inspection in the quality of teaching and in a more demanding syllabus at Key Stage 4 for those students who do not opt for GCSE. Links have not been developed with other departments, as was recommended in the last report, and sixth form religious education is not given enough curriculum time to fulfil the statutory requirements of the Kent Agreed Syllabus.

OTHER SUBJECTS

BUSINESS STUDIES AND ECONOMICS

197. A-level examination standards have fluctuated but standards of the current Year 13 students are above national expectations. Students' use of information and communications technology is currently underdeveloped as new computer equipment has only recently been obtained by the department.

198. In lessons observed students consolidated theory learnt from visits to local companies and textbooks in short but challenging research projects. Students calculated costs and profits using marginal costing and ratio analysis. Most students use information and communications technology to draw graphs to analyse research questionnaires. Overall students achieve well, although good projects are sometimes spoiled by uncorrected errors.

199. Teachers use appropriate classroom methods including challenging worksheets, and students display very good attitudes, maintaining enthusiasm, interest and perseverance in their tasks. Teachers' methods, applying theory through topical case studies to develop numeracy and literacy skills, result in students writing focused, critical essays which are constructively marked. Students feel well prepared for university and many go on to study economics and business studies. Further development of group presentations to develop communication skills is required. Students help organise a business conference for a group of schools. Several students join the school's Young Enterprise company and

successfully make and market products for sale locally. Text book resources are good and close links with a number of local business partners have been developed.

GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

200. This subject is taught by the history department at A and A/S levels and as part of the general studies course. Over the past three years, there has been a considerable improvement in standards at A-level. In 1999, all A-level students achieved a grade in the range A-E and three-fifths the higher grades A/B. Standards are well above national expectations and in line with other subjects in the school. Students taking the subject at A/S level achieved grades in the range C-E. There is a major departmental focus on the improvement of standards at these levels.

201. The teaching of the A-level was very good with examples of inspirational teaching. A particular strength of the teaching is the subject knowledge of the teachers and this enables students to make very good learning gains. In a lesson on 'Cabinet Governance' all students were able to develop balanced judgements for and against such a model as a result of the high quality of teacher exposition and their willingness to contribute their views. They are articulate and make effective use of their communication skills. Students produce essays of a high standard which include particularly good analysis and evaluation of the information and data available to them. Students are highly motivated, work well in pairs and groups, and persevere with their work. In a lesson on the 'London Elections', the teacher had clear and high expectations of the students, was able to stimulate their interest and extend their knowledge using students' previously completed research to prepare an essay plan. Students achieve well in these lessons. Similarly very good teaching was observed in a general studies lesson concerned with 'Political Parties'.

SOCIOLOGY

202. In the A-level examinations of 1999 all students achieved a grade in the range A-E, the proportion achieving the higher grades was exceptional. These results are excellent when set against national expectations and well above the mean for the school. Current standards are very high at this stage; the students having exceptionally good knowledge and understanding. In a lesson on "Convergence Theory" students were able to display a sophisticated understanding of similar theories, identify differences and support their very perceptive answers with evidence and reference to specific authors. Achievement is very good. The teachers work hard to ensure that all students achieve their full potential and a very effective system of student mentoring has been in place for some years.

203. Teaching and learning were excellent. Teachers are enthusiastic, caring and supportive, they have very good subject knowledge and place due emphasis upon the accurate and appropriate use of sociological terms. Students' attitudes to their learning are excellent; they are able to sustain their concentration and pose pertinent questions in order to clarify understanding. They have covered an appropriate range of topics, compiled good notes from both class activities and their own reading, and the standard of their essays is a particular strength of their work. The marking of work is good and essays are annotated with corrections and helpful comments. Course books are provided for each pupil and are supported by a good range of additional texts and other resources.

204. The department is very efficiently managed and led with flair. An appropriate departmental development plan has been drawn up and there is a good departmental handbook. The teaching and learning in sociology is a significant strength of the school.