

INSPECTION REPORT

HIGHWORTH GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

Ashford, Kent

LEA area: Kent

Unique reference number: 118804

Headteacher: Mrs Lesley Lee

Reporting inspector: Mr George Knights
3268

Dates of inspection: 20th – 24th March 2000

Inspection number: 185582

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

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Selective
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	11 to 18 years
Gender of students:	Girls
School address:	Quantock Drive Ashford Kent
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs Caroline Mullins
Date of previous inspection:	October 1995

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members		Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
Mr G Knights	Registered inspector		The characteristics and effectiveness of the school and Key Issues for Action
			How high are standards? – The school's results and achievements
			How well are students taught?
			How well is the school led and managed?
Mrs C Hinds	Lay inspector	Drama (support)	How high are standards? - Students' attitudes, values and personal development
			How well does the school care for its students?
			How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
Ms G Barnes	Team inspector	English (with Drama)	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
Mr D Lee	Team inspector	Mathematics	
Ms G Biscoomb	Team inspector	Physical education	
		Equal opportunities	
		Special educational needs	
Ms S Daniel	Team inspector	Science	
Ms J Watson	Team inspector	Design and technology	
		Information and communications technology	
Mr M Pennington	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
Mr R Grogan	Team inspector	History	
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Ms L Tumman	Team inspector	Geography	
Ms M Benwell	Team inspector	Music	
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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

This is a girls' selective school, serving students from 11 to 18 years of age. It is located in the town of Ashford in Kent and students come from the town and surrounding villages. There is thus a large number of partner primary schools. There are 974 students on roll, which is above the average number for selective schools nationally. The school is over-subscribed and numbers on roll are rising. The school takes students from roughly the highest 25 per cent of the ability range. The students come from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds. There is little adult unemployment in the area and hence the number of students eligible for free school meals is low. There are very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds and only 21 students have English as an additional language, reflecting the school's catchment area. Only 23 students are on the register of special educational needs, one of these having a statement of special educational needs. Over ninety per cent of students continue to study in the sixth form at the school and around four fifths leaving the school after Advanced Level study enter higher education.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

Highworth Grammar School For Girls is a school with many strengths which far outweigh the areas in which improvements are needed. Consistently good teaching ensures that the students make very good progress and attain very good standards. The school offers very good value for money.

What the school does well

- The highly effective, visionary, leadership of the headteacher provides a clear direction for the school, enabling it to achieve its published aims.
- Teaching is consistently good. Teachers share a common purpose and strong commitment to helping students attain high standards across the curriculum.
- The high quality of relationships throughout the school ensures that the students feel secure and respected by both staff and other students. The students' very good attitudes ensure that they make best use of all learning opportunities.
- Teachers give freely of their time in providing a wide range of extra-curricular activities which are well supported by the students. This adds an important dimension to students' learning experiences.
- Provision for social, moral and cultural development provides students with a keen sense of their place in society. It contributes well to the establishment of a school community based on trust, understanding and mutual respect.
- The school works exceptionally hard to encourage full parental understanding of, and involvement in, the life of the school which has created a distinct and valuable partnership.
- Newly qualified teachers, and those in training, receive high quality support and guidance in the initial stages of their professional development.
- Effective use is made of available resources.

What could be improved

- Standards in information and communications technology are not high enough because not all students are able to receive their full statutory entitlement.
- The teaching of skills such as investigation, research and analysis is not consistently well developed across all subjects.
- The current programme of monitoring in departments requires more rigour in evaluating quality of work in order to bring about further improvements in teaching.
- Better use of assessment information is needed to improve the focus of teachers' planning and to provide students with better guidance on how to improve their work.
- Not all students follow a design and technology course in Key Stage 4 which is, at present, a statutory requirement.
- Provision is not made for all students to have a daily act of collective worship.

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 good overall progress since the previous inspection. Standards have improved throughout the school, with GCSE and GCE Advanced Level results being significantly higher than five years ago. The overall quality of teaching has also improved. The school has taken steps to address the key issues identified in the previous inspection report. Standards are considerably higher in science as a result of changes in management and organisation. The length of the school day has been increased but remains below the recommended level. The programme of personal, social and health education has been improved and staff have been given some training, but the quality of the teaching of this course remains variable. Some work has been done to ensure a better match of work in lessons to the needs of students. Teachers have begun to make better use of assessment, but more remains to be done. The school now makes arrangements for the provision of religious education in the sixth form. Health and safety issues identified previously have been addressed. The school still does not provide all students with a daily act of collective worship.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by 14, 16 and 18 year olds based on average point scores in national tests, GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			similar schools
	1997	1998	1999	1999
Key Stage 3 tests	A*	A*	A*	D
GCSE examinations	A*	A*	A*	C
A-levels/AS-levels	A	A*	A	

Key

Very high A*

Well above average A

Above average B

Average C

Below average D

well below average E

The school's national test results for 14 year olds in English, mathematics and science have all been consistently very high when compared with all schools nationally, though below average when compared with all selective schools. Students make good progress during Key Stage 3, improving their results by an average of around one and three quarter levels in these three subjects. Progress is greatest in mathematics, where students are able to gain Level 8 by taking extension papers, but improvements in attainment in English and science are also impressive.

GCSE results are also very high when compared with all schools nationally and are broadly in line with the national average results for all selective schools. The school ranked eighth out of thirty three Kent grammar schools in the GCSE examinations in 1999. In this year, all students taking GCSE examinations gained five or more GCSE A* to C grades.

At Advanced Level, the attainment of students is well above the national average for all schools. This has been the pattern for the previous three years. Results at both GCSE and Advanced Level are better than at the time of the previous inspection.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students adopt very positive attitudes to their work and to wider aspects of school life. The high level of involvement in extra-curricular activities indicates their enthusiasm for what the school offers to them.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is very good, both in lessons and around the school. Students mix well together, with older students offering excellent support for younger students.
Personal development and relationships	Relationships in the school, both among students and between students and teachers, are very good. The school makes a good contribution to students' personal development.
Attendance	Overall levels of attendance are very good with very little unauthorised attendance. Punctuality to school and to lessons is also very good.

Very high levels of mutual interest, trust and respect are particular features of life in the school. A positive atmosphere encourages students to develop independence in their learning.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	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, teaching has improved since the previous inspection. Teaching throughout the school is now at least satisfactory in almost all lessons. It is at least good in over four fifths of lessons and is very good or excellent in around two lessons in five. In English, mathematics and science it is never less than satisfactory, with around half the teaching in these subjects being very good.

Good progress has been made in improving students' literacy skills across the curriculum. Not all teachers make enough use of information and communications technology, either to develop skills or to help learning in other subjects. Teachers plan their lessons well and have high levels of expectation of what students can achieve. Many encourage high levels of student participation, but some opportunities are missed, especially in Key Stages 3 and 4, to develop students' higher order learning skills, such as investigation, enquiry and research. Some teachers do not use day to day assessments well enough to guide students in what they need to do to improve.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The school offers a broad and balanced programme of study at Key Stage 3, including opportunities to study a second foreign language and Latin. At Key Stage 4, students are able to select from a good range of subjects, but the school is not able to require all to study a design and technology subject. At both key stages, provision for information and communications technology is inadequate to meet statutory requirements. The sixth form curriculum is also broad and balanced. Students benefit from an excellent programme of clubs, activities and societies beyond normal classroom lessons.
Provision for students with special educational needs or for whom English is an additional language	The small number of students in these categories are well catered for and they make good progress.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Students have many good opportunities to develop confidence and independence in a supportive community. Very good provision is made for students' social, moral and cultural development. While some opportunities for developing students' spiritual awareness are provided in religious education and some other subjects, there is no planned approach to this aspect of work throughout the curriculum. Hence, in both assemblies and some lessons, potential opportunities are missed. The school's provision for collective worship does not meet requirements.
How well the school cares for its students	The school cares very well for its students. Staff are consistently caring and concerned to ensure students' well-being. Arrangements for monitoring students' academic work and personal development are both good, as is the educational support and guidance offered. Arrangements for child protection are very good.

The school offers a wide range of curriculum opportunities, enriched by an excellent programme of extra-curricular activities in which almost all students participate. Care is taken to ensure that

students make the most of the opportunities provided, both within and beyond classroom lessons. The lack of adequate provision for information and communications technology throughout the school detracts from the otherwise very good provision.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher offers clear, visionary leadership. She is well supported by members of the senior management team and by increasingly influential heads of year and heads of department.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are active and committed. Through an effective committee structure and regular meetings, they fulfil most of their statutory responsibilities and offer valuable support and guidance on general school developments.
The school's evaluation of its performance	This is an area currently being developed in the school. Regular reviews of students' results guide future planning and some monitoring of teaching takes place, but this is not yet sufficiently evaluative to ensure further improvement.
The strategic use of resources	The school makes good use of the resources available, through careful planning and effective decision-making.

The school is well staffed by suitably qualified teachers who are well supported by a team of administrative staff. The school is well resourced, though library provision needs to be reviewed. Recent improvements in the provision of information and communications technology equipment have brought the school to average levels of provision, but more information and communications technology resources are required in subjects across the curriculum. Buildings in the school have recently been extended and accommodation is now adequate to meet the school's current needs.

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 coming to the school. • The school is well led and managed. • Students make good progress. • Teaching is good, with high expectations of what students will achieve. • The school works closely with parents who are kept well informed about the progress of their daughters. • The school welcomes approaches from parents when concerns arise. • Students are helped to become mature and responsible. • There is a very good range of activities for students outside normal lessons. 	<p>A small number of parents expressed concern about:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The amount of homework students are given. • The information provided about the progress being made by their daughters. • The closeness with which the school seeks to work with parents.

The inspectors agree with parents' positive views of the school. Very good leadership, good teaching, high expectations and a wide range of extra-curricular activities are distinctive features of the school. The school does work closely with parents, providing them with good quality information about how well their daughters are progressing. While inspectors judge the homework provision to be appropriate overall, there are occasions when tasks set are of limited value and students are not always given sufficient guidance about the volume of work expected of them.

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

1. Students entering the school have achieved, at the end of Key Stage 2, standards which place them in the top quarter of students nationally. In 1999, the proportion of students entering the school with overall results above the national average in the three core subjects of mathematics, English and science was around 70 per cent, though with over 80 per cent of students being above average in English. Attainment on entry to the school has remained close to these levels over the past few years, even though numbers on roll have risen in the past two years.
2. By the end of Key Stage 3, students in the school attain results which are very high when compared with all schools nationally. During the key stage, students across the ability range make good progress, with average gains of over one and a half levels in English, one and three quarter levels in science and over two levels in mathematics. These results, overall, are consistent with results in recent years, though there has been a slight improvement in mathematics results and a slight decline in performance in Key Stage 3 tests in science over the past three years. The attainment of students at the end of Key Stage 3 is better than at the time of the previous inspection.
3. In other subjects, standards at the end of Key Stage 3 are also good, being well above national expectations. This is particularly the case in geography, history and design and technology, where there have been very high teacher assessments over the past three years. Standards of work in modern foreign languages are very good, especially for the first language which students study throughout the key stage. Standards of work in art, music and physical education are also high, with students demonstrating good levels of skill. Attainment in information and communications technology by the end of Year 7 is good. However, the lack of a discrete information and communications technology course in Years 8 and 9 means that these standards are not consistently maintained and are below national expectations by the end of the key stage. Attainment in religious education is well above the expectations of the Locally Agreed Syllabus. The work of students currently in the school suggests that these levels of attainment, at the end of Key Stage 3, will be maintained or improved in the next few years.
4. Students make very good progress during Key Stage 4 and results in GCSE examinations are very high when compared with all schools nationally. In 1999, all students entered for GCSE examinations gained five or more A* to C grades. The school ranks eighth out of thirty three at the end of Key Stage 4 when compared with other selective schools in the local authority and, overall, the attainment of students is in line with that in all selective schools nationally. A pattern of steady improvement in attainment has been maintained over the past three years and results are better than at the time of the previous inspection.
5. In the core subjects of English, mathematics and science, attainment in GCSE examinations is well above the national average and above average for selective schools. Science results, particularly, have improved since the previous inspection, though there has been an upward trend in all core subjects. In English Literature too, results are above the average for selective schools.

6. In other subjects, results in 1999 are all well above the national average. In art, geography, history, modern foreign languages and religious education, results are above the average for selective schools. In design and technology results have been improving over the past three years and, in 1999, all students entered for GCSE gained A* to C grades. For those students following the information and communications technology course, results in 1999 were above the average for selective schools. In religious education a very high proportion of students gained A* or A grades in the most recent examinations. Standards in GCSE physical education were higher in 1999 than in previous years, with overall results being better than the national average.
7. The vast majority of students remain at the school to study in the sixth form, where they make good progress. In 1999, the results, as represented by the average point score per student, indicate that students are achieving standards which are well above the national average. These standards have been maintained over the past three years and Advanced Level results are higher than at the time of the previous inspection.
8. English is a very popular subject in the sixth form and results in the most recent Advanced Level examination were above the national average and were in line with the average for selective schools. Similarly, mathematics standards in the sixth form are very good, with results in 1999 being above the average for selective schools. All students following the Advanced Level mathematics course in the past three years have secured a pass grade. Results in biology and human biology were above average and in line with the average for selective schools in 1999.
9. Standards in most other Advanced Level subjects are also very high. In 1999, results in art, geography and history were all well above the average for selective schools. In art, three quarters of students entered gained either A or B grades. Results in history have shown a steadily upward trend, as have those in modern foreign languages where recent results have been in line with those in selective schools. The small number taking religious education in 1999 achieved results which were better than in the previous year. Those students following the Advanced Level course in physical education achieved results in 1999 which were above the national average, as were results in general studies.
10. Students' use of language is encouraged across the school and developed by opportunities for extended talk in all subjects and by the display of key words in some classrooms. Many students use technical vocabulary with confidence, displaying very good standards of competence in their oral presentations. They research enthusiastically using a variety of sources, they study texts conscientiously and write in depth in many subjects. Standards of handwriting, presentation and accuracy are good throughout the school. An initiative is soon to be introduced to target the further development of students' literacy competence throughout the curriculum.
11. Students have good opportunities to develop their numerical skills, especially in mathematics. The mathematics department has begun to evolve a range of strategies to enhance and improve these skills, especially in mental arithmetic. There is currently no whole school approach to the development of this basic skill, however, and this means that progress in improving numeracy skills is slower than for literacy skills. Students are able to apply their mathematical skills effectively in

science, through the drawing and interpretation of graphs related to their experimental work. In geography, students use a range of statistical measures to interpret the data they have collated and they are able to present these graphically. In the design aspects of design and technology, students effectively learn to use instruments for accurate measurement. Overall, students are confident in the use of number, time and measurement, and can express and interpret information in graphic form.

12. Through class lessons in Year 7, students are able to gain early skills in the use of information and communications technology. In these lessons they learn rapidly, demonstrating good control of the applications of learned routines and skills. Similarly, those students who follow a GCSE course in information and communications technology in Key Stage 4 display high levels of skill in the acquisition and application of their information and communications technology capability. Elsewhere, the school intends that students develop their information and communications technology skills within the context of other subjects but this provision is currently very uneven. Some departments are not sufficiently well equipped and there has been a shortage of relevant staff training to ensure that all subjects are making the sort of contribution necessary to enhance learning in their subjects alongside the development of information and communications technology skills.
13. The special educational needs of students are identified, either before they arrive or during their time at the school. Their progress is monitored carefully and regularly and arrangements are made, when necessary, for additional support from outside agencies to help students overcome specific difficulties. The very small number of students on the register of special educational needs who have additional support for writing and spelling make good progress. Students for whom English is an additional language are given effective additional support when they arrive at the school, enabling them to make progress very quickly and achieve good results by the end of the key stages.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

14. The students' very good attitudes toward school ensure that they make the best use of all learning opportunities. Students enjoy coming to school and talk positively about their lessons. They show very high levels of interest in the wide range of clubs which are provided for them and the many activities organised by the students themselves. The exceptionally high figure of 85 per cent of students being involved in some form of extra-curricular activity demonstrates how keen they are to participate. Students are allocated to one of six houses and they are particularly enthusiastic about the wide range of activities available through this organisation. Excellent house notice boards advertise and promote an extensive programme of sporting, social, charitable and cultural activities, all managed by the students themselves. Many students talked eagerly and with pride and loyalty about the achievements of their own house.
15. Attitudes to work are generally positive and often very good or excellent. Sustained interest and motivation throughout lessons is commonplace. Students are enthusiastic and thoroughly enjoy their learning, for instance in a Year 11 English lesson where students were questioning, discussing and disagreeing with one another about their role play of 'An Inspector Calls'. Year 13 personal and health education students were often laughing merrily at each other's contributions to what

makes a healthy balanced diet. A positive buzz of focused conversation characterised a Year 9 chemistry lesson where students were sharing hypotheses with one another during experiments with metals and solutions.

16. Students are very well behaved in lessons and around the school. They manage themselves very well, even in areas of congestion such as some of the stairwells and around lockers. Here, they demonstrate appropriate levels of consideration for others. Students' behaviour in assembly is often impeccable, showing their clear commitment to the school's high expectations. Their behaviour in informal situations, as instanced by the very pleasant atmosphere in the canteen at lunchtimes, is totally appropriate. It is, equally, not unusual to see students sitting quietly eating in the permitted areas around the school and generally chatting and socialising well. Only rarely is students' behaviour not up to these very high standards and very few students have difficulty keeping the school's rules. The school has a clear policy to prevent and handle bullying and the very good practice matches this policy. Bullying is exceedingly rare and students are confident that, when it does occur, it is dealt with promptly and effectively.
17. Relationships throughout the whole school community are very good. Students relate very well to one another. Many examples were seen in the classrooms of students helping one another. Year 8 dancers quickly developed their ideas about working in unison when dancing in pairs and groups with hoops and relay batons. Shared problem solving was evident in a Year 9 mathematics lesson on simultaneous equations. Excellent team work occurred in Year 11 group presentations on aspects of blood. Throughout this lesson students were listening to, questioning and supporting one another. This constant mutual support encourages all students to try hard at whatever they are doing. Relationships between students and adults are also very good. Very high levels of mutual interest, trust and respect are evident and are a particular feature of life in the school.
18. Another distinctive characteristic of the school is the very good personal development of many of the students. They are mature and sensible. Many take a very active part in the life and organisation of the school. A large number take on the role of form captains. The students holding these responsibilities do so proudly and, amongst many other duties, diligently represent their form on the very active Student Council. The team of prefects take significant responsibility for the effective running of the school, managing particular areas of the school, supervising at break and lunch and organising a number of school events. They are linked to form groups of younger girls and offer considerable support and guidance in this capacity. Students show high levels of personal initiative. Some are well able to manage their own lives at school. They follow up their own ideas for money-raising activities for charities. They proffer help willingly and many commit significant time and energy to meeting the needs of others. They show maturity and poise in many lessons. The mature approach of Year 10 English students studying the key characters in a Shakespearean text, for example, allowed instant movement from jest to seriousness.
19. The vast majority of students are very sensitive to, and interested in, the views of others who may have different feelings, experiences and beliefs. Extremely sensitive comments were forthcoming from a Year 10 religious education class, for example, identifying and considering the nature of a funeral service. These students were sympathetically sharing their experiences about helping people in

mourning. Another group of Year 10 students were well able to reflect on human suffering as they examined testimonial texts from holocaust survivors.

20. The enthusiasm which students display for school is reflected in the attendance figures which are very good. Very few students are late for school.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. The overall quality of teaching in the school is good and has improved since the time of the previous inspection. Teaching is now at least satisfactory in almost all lessons and it is good or better in over four fifths of lessons and very good or excellent in two fifths. Teaching is particularly good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form, where around half of all teaching is very good or excellent. Only one unsatisfactory lesson was observed during the inspection. This good teaching overall enables the students to make good progress in their learning.
22. The teaching of English is very good, especially for older students. Drama teaching, which also forms part of the English department's provision, is also very good and students make very good progress in these subjects. In a range of subjects across the curriculum teachers provide good opportunities for the development of students' literacy skills, thus supporting the work of the English department. The teaching of mathematics is also very good, with some excellent teaching in the sixth form. The teaching of science is good. It is better in Key Stages 3 and 4 than in the sixth form where some lessons, especially in chemistry, are only satisfactory because lessons are not sufficiently well structured to ensure that students make good progress.
23. Across the curriculum, teaching is generally good in all subjects. Teaching is a particular strength in history, where all teaching in Key Stage 4 is very good and in religious education, where half of all teaching in Key Stages 3 and 4 is of very good quality. Teaching varies most in quality in personal, social and health education, where some tutors make greater attempts than others to present material prepared for them in a stimulating, interesting and challenging way.
24. Teachers generally have very good subject knowledge and a good grasp of how best to present their subject to students. Often this knowledge translates into a real enthusiasm for what is being taught and this transmits itself to the students who, in turn, are enthusiastic about their studies. This is a particular feature of much teaching in science and mathematics. In several subjects, teachers' awareness of the potential and possibilities for the development and application of information and communications technology is not well developed, with the consequence that, in these subjects, insufficient sufficient opportunities are provided for students to acquire and apply these skills. The teaching of language skills across all subjects is a priority in the school and, in many subjects, good progress is being made, but the school does not yet have a consistent policy for the development and application of a range of mathematical skills. Thus, progress in the use of mathematics in other subjects varies considerably.
25. In almost all subjects teachers' expectations of what students can achieve are very high. This is particularly true in art and in Key Stage 4 science. These high expectations translate into lessons which are planned to move at a good pace, with challenging work for students to undertake. Students of all levels of ability, including the gifted and talented, are encouraged to exert intellectual, physical and creative effort. This they do very well, especially in the sixth form in art and geography, and throughout the school in history, modern foreign languages,

mathematics and religious education. Most subjects are taught in double lessons which are rather long and, in some subjects such as geography, the work achieved in some lessons could be covered in slightly shorter teaching sessions.

26. The management of students is a strength of teaching across the school. Good relationships between teachers and students create a positive, purposeful atmosphere in almost all classrooms. In turn, this encourages students to apply themselves well to their work. In general, students show high levels of concentration and perseverance and are genuinely interested in their studies. They contribute well to discussion, listening and responding in a mature way to the contributions of others. Only on very rare occasions do students step outside this pattern of high commitment and good behaviour and, when this happens, teachers deal very effectively and constructively with these students. Teachers, occasionally, are supported by a classroom assistant or by other teachers and good use is made of this support. Resources are well used.
27. Teachers use a wide range of teaching methods to present their subjects in stimulating ways. Many lessons are characterised by discussion and debate, while a significant amount of practical work enables students to experience a range of topics at first hand. This practical work, particularly in science, design and technology, physical education, drama and, in Year 7, in information and communications technology, helps students develop a high level of practical skill and insight into their studies. In some subjects, and particularly in history, students are challenged to use their intellectual ability to think critically, to make judgements and to support them with relevant facts. Good, sharply focused discussion between students characterises these very successful lessons. While discussion and debate is a feature of most subjects, with students being challenged to put forward ideas, develop hypotheses and test these against evidence, the high level of intellectual challenge which characterises most history lessons is not consistently the case elsewhere.
28. The one other area of relative weakness in teaching is the use which teachers make of day to day assessment to guide planning and to provide students with a clear picture of how well they are doing. This is particularly an area for development at Key Stage 3, where, especially in subjects such as art, geography and mathematics, students do not receive sufficiently detailed and specific guidance on how well they are performing in different aspects of the subject. In turn, they are less clear about what they need to do to improve and this tends to slow their rate of progress.
29. Students are encouraged to undertake a great deal of work beyond the classroom. Homework tasks are set regularly and are marked conscientiously. Work set is almost always appropriate and relevant to the work being undertaken in lessons. Students are very diligent about completing work, recognising that the tasks are directly relevant to the work they are doing in lessons. Just occasionally, tasks are set which make greater demand on time than the outcomes would justify and, also occasionally, teachers are not sufficiently clear in their instructions to students about what, exactly, is expected of them.
30. Teachers understand the specific needs of a small number of students with special educational needs or for whom English is an additional language. Individual education plans, and additional information provided by the special educational needs co-ordinator, enable teachers to plan work appropriately for these students.

Teachers are aware of the needs of the students on the register of special educational needs and give sensitive support within the classroom. The support assistant provides excellent and well-selected support, enabling the student to work independently as far as possible.

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

31. The curriculum provided by the school ensures a broad and balanced range of high quality learning opportunities. It includes all subjects of the National Curriculum, provides for religious education and meets the interests, aptitudes and needs of all students, including the gifted and talented. It offers equality of access to all students, effective support for those with special educational needs and is enriched by an excellent range of extra-curricular activities. There are some deficiencies, linked to aspects of provision, which the school has plans to rectify.
32. The length of the teaching week has been extended since the time of the last inspection but, at 23 hours and 45 minutes, is still less than the recommended minimum. Transport arrangements for the extensive area served by the school are a determining factor in the school's carefully considered decision on teaching time. Disadvantages of a shortened teaching week are compensated for by the generally efficient use of available lesson time, high participation in extra-curricular activities, a consistently conscientious response to relevant homework and the inclusion of tutorial time for all students. Curriculum planning closely matches the school's aims and departmental schemes of work address continuity and progression in students' learning.
33. In Key Stage 3, students are taught in tutor groups, with the facility for smaller classes in design and technology. Setting by ability is introduced in mathematics from Year 8. All students study two modern foreign languages and Latin from Year 8, which is continued in Year 9 for those showing sufficient aptitude. The time shortage for physical education, reported at the time of the previous inspection, has been resolved but the allocation for personal, social and health education remains low. Students in Years 8 and 9 do not receive their full entitlement to information and communications technology as the plans to integrate the teaching of this subject across the curriculum have not yet been fully implemented.
34. The Key Stage 4 curriculum provides all students with the opportunity of studying a wide range of subjects and the balance of individuals' learning programmes is checked carefully by tutors and senior staff. Setting by ability continues in mathematics, and is introduced in science, to enable some students to study three discrete sciences. Tuition in Latin is provided after school and in the lunch break. The time allocated for physical education is now adequate but that for the common religious education course is insufficient to allow for in-depth study or for detailed written work. Significantly improved facilities have recently removed the school's inability to provide the full entitlement to design and technology at this key stage. The governing body has, however, decided not to proceed with plans to provide a design and technology course for all students in the coming year, pending changes in legislation. The full provision for information and communications technology is currently assured only for those students participating in examination courses in the

subject.

35. A strength of the school is the extensive range of provision for academic study in the sixth form. The curriculum is organized to maximize opportunity and to meet individual needs. The GCE Advanced Level and AS-level subjects are well managed, of good quality and relevant to the students. The popularity of these courses and co-operative arrangements with a neighbouring boys' grammar school, allow all courses to be taught in separate year groups. New subjects are considered in response to requests from prospective students and courses are modified in line with changing national trends. The very small minority seeking GNVQ courses are encouraged to explore other post-16 institutions in the area where extensive provision is available.
36. Sixth form students follow a taught course in general studies, with some gaining Advanced Level examination success. This widens their horizons beyond their specialist studies and enlarges awareness of the relevance of their studies to the world of work and future careers. An innovative programme of day conferences enables the requirements for religious education to be met. A strong feature of the sixth form is students' commitment to community service, charity work and extra-curricular activities. The sixth form is very successful in its recruitment and well over four fifths of students continue to higher education.

Students' personal, spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

37. The school has developed a detailed programme of personal, health and social education, which includes provision for sex and drugs education. Much of this course is taught by form tutors and this arrangement leads to some inconsistencies in the quality of the experiences from class to class. Effective arrangements are made to ensure that, when sensitive issues are addressed in the course, appropriate personnel, including visitors from the community, are available.
38. Through a range of activities, the school makes a satisfactory contribution to students' spiritual development. The assembly programme and work in religious education, provides some opportunities for increasing spiritual awareness and times for reflection. These are complemented by opportunities for the exploration of spiritual aspects of life, for example through the study of literature in English and for reflection on such things as sacrifice in a study of aspects of war in history. Other examples include a study of suffering and death in religious education and the impact of natural disasters, such as earthquakes, in geography. Elsewhere in the curriculum, and in some assemblies, opportunities are not provided for students to explore their responses and reactions beyond the rational and factual. The school does not provide for all students to have a daily act of collective worship.
39. Many features of the curriculum contribute very well to students' moral development. Staff provide excellent personal role models in the way they interact with one another and with students. Moral issues are studied in depth in English, religious education, history and geography. Issues of right and wrong are presented and explored in detail and with sensitivity. Students have opportunities to debate moral and ethical issues, for example those related to genetics in Advanced Level biology lessons.
40. Students are encouraged to take up charitable work and they respond very positively. This contributes well to their awareness of social responsibility and is a

significant element in ensuring that students' social development through activities in school is very good. The school provides many opportunities for students to work together in lessons and there are many examples of older students providing support and guidance in a sensitive and mature way for the younger students. The Student Council gives good opportunities for members to develop a sense of social responsibility. The wide range of extra-curricular activities, including residential trips and visits, also contributes well to developing students' social awareness.

41. The school makes a very good contribution to students' cultural development. Aspects of the culture of this country are presented through activities in many subjects, including English, music and art, and these are supplemented by a wide variety of opportunities for students to join trips and visits to theatres, concerts and museums. The wider aspects of our culture, and of life in a multi-cultural society are also well catered for. In religious education, students have good opportunities to explore cultural aspects of different religions and, through a study of literature, music and art, aspects of other cultures are explored. Work within the modern foreign languages department, especially related to the many foreign links which the school maintains, also effectively helps to broaden students' perspectives. In history, design and technology and geography, students are able to explore different cultural groups, while students use Indian images for textile design in art and explore Islamic patterns in mathematics.

Careers education and guidance

42. The provision for careers education and guidance is good. Careers education forms an important element of personal, social and health education provision from Year 8 and is planned to lead up to significant events such as option choices in Years 9 and 11. Students are familiarised with a range of careers and then encouraged to research possible career pathways to support their subject option choice for Key Stage 4. Good links exist with the professional careers co-ordinator attached to the school who provides expert impartial advice on career routes. Individual interviews are provided for the minority of students who do not intend to stay into the sixth form. Helpful advice introduces all students to the full range of post-16 alternatives. Students are informed about the school's post-16 provision by a booklet, parents' information evening and an 'options fair', presented by Year 12 students.
43. Sixth form provision is focused mainly on exploring higher education routes and preparing for university application and life. Additional sessions are devoted to other options including employment and gap years. Advice given is effective in broadening the range of courses which students consider, as indicated by the significant numbers who go on to study vocationally related degree courses.
44. All Year 10 students take part in a two-week work experience programme that provides a worthwhile opportunity to discover the demands of working life. Unfortunately, the timing of this at the end of Year 10 limits the use made of this experience in other subjects, for example to promote a range of writing in English. Year 12 students take part in community work experience which makes a valuable contribution to their personal development. Sixth form students of modern foreign languages have the opportunity to undertake work experience in Europe. Good links are made with local employers, especially in science and design and technology, but these are not yet involved in providing interview experience for students.

Extra-curricular activities

45. Students' learning experiences are enriched by an exceptional range of extra-curricular opportunities held after school and in the lunch break. They include clubs for all subjects and activities specifically to support students in their school and home based learning. Participation in the school's high quality dramatic and musical productions is popular. Extra-curricular sport and inter-form competitions are strengths of the school. The range is wide, student participation rates are very high, fair play and good sporting behaviour are exercised and a high level of competitive sporting success is achieved. All students participate during their time in school in relevant day visits, and the majority in residential activities. Expeditions and foreign exchanges provide many students with an opportunity to work in a group situation and to relate more closely to staff in an out of lesson environments. The school enjoys a high level of success in local and national competitions.

Community Links

46. Very good links with the community help students to understand their current and future roles within a diverse and changing society. Placements in a wide range of establishments, from nurseries to charity shops, help sixth form students on their community placements understand, appreciate and support the needs of different groups and ages within the local community context. Effective use is made of an extensive range of professionals from health, social, charitable and service organizations to enrich the personal, social and health education programme. The school makes sensitive use of the local area and population to extend the students' knowledge and understanding in a variety of subjects. History students visit a local day care centre to absorb, at first hand, the experiences of World War 2 veterans and features of earlier twentieth century life. Graphics students work well with a range of local establishments, developing their understanding of design techniques, and drama students participate enthusiastically in local workshops.
47. The school has good links with other schools locally and very good international links. Exchanges with French, Spanish and German schools help students develop their European understanding, and e-mail links are planned with the German and Spanish schools. Regular and well organised contacts with the local boys' grammar school through co-operative sixth-form teaching supports a range of Advanced Level and general studies courses. Shared music and drama productions, and a programme of shared exchange visits help girls to learn to work alongside boys. The school is aware of the need to work closely with primary schools to ensure continuity in the students' learning and tries hard to meet this need. An effective induction programme ensures regular contact with a number of partner primary schools.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

48. The school has good arrangements for ensuring that students are safe and secure in school. Clear policies exist and the systems in practice match these policies. Very good arrangements are in place for caring for sick or injured students. Child protection arrangements are very good, excellent attention being given to the security of information.
49. Of particular benefit to the welfare of the students is the very genuine and

consistent caring attitude of all teaching and support staff. The students at Highworth benefit from the time, energy and thought which staff give to identifying and promoting each student's individual and unique needs. Staff work hard and enthusiastically during lessons and in the many lunchtime and after school activities, to achieve this rapport. Students and staff work and play extremely well together. A good example of this harmony was observed during the school choir practice at lunchtime, where students and staff were rehearsing together. Very good use is made of students themselves in the support of others. Form prefects make a particularly valuable contribution to the social and emotional support of younger students. A very good mentoring programme has been introduced for students who require help through individual challenges. A counsellor visits the school weekly and this arrangement is very valuable in supporting students experiencing particular difficulties.

50. The school has extremely effective induction arrangements which help new students make a positive and productive start to their time at school. The programme even contains an orienteering exercise in the grounds so that students can familiarise themselves with the whole environment.
51. The school now has good procedures in place for assessing how well students are achieving and progressing in their studies. Very good practice has been developed in some departments, such as English and design and technology. Here the departments spell out clearly and in detail what a student needs to do next to improve in specific areas of the subject. In addition, students themselves are often closely involved in identifying their own strengths, weaknesses and areas for improvement. However, this clarity and precision of assessment processes is not fully developed in all departments. Departments have a range of criteria for marking work. For example, in modern foreign languages, a five point numerical scale is used whereas the science department uses A to E grades. Criteria are used consistently within departments but not translated into National Curriculum levels for subjects in Key Stage 3, except in English, design and technology and information and communications technology in Year 7. Form tutors have a clear overview of each student's progress, effort and achievement through the school's termly internal progress reviews. Any significant change in academic or personal performance is carefully identified, supported and monitored. Parents are informed on a termly basis about their daughter's progress. The interim progress review is a quick, straightforward and efficient way to monitor academic progress, enabling the school to identify students in difficulties as well as those deserving of praise.
52. Improvement in assessment has been a strong feature of the school development plan and departments have been allocated time to improve this aspect. Good self-assessment by students in the sixth form is a result of this initiative and now includes comments by teachers. This is contributing to high attainment and motivation for the majority of students. Departments evaluate test and examination results and use this to make curricular changes as appropriate, for example the introduction of double award science for the majority of students.
53. Procedures for promoting appropriate behaviour are very good and their consistent application helps create the very orderly community at Highworth and focus the students on their learning whilst in lessons. Recognition and acknowledgement of good behaviour is used very well to motivate students to work hard and behave well. The very few students who find conforming to normal expectations difficult are very well supported with individual support programmes. Procedures to raise the

students' awareness of bullying and associated issues are very effective. The Student Council has been very actively involved in suggesting ways of raising the profile of the dangers of bullying and in monitoring the effects.

54. Rewards are unnecessary to persuade students to attend regularly. From the signing of the Home School Agreement and throughout their school career the importance of regular attendance is successfully emphasised to all students and their families. Rigorous and vigorous recording, following up and analysing all absences also ensure that the school's attendance figures are good.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

55. Parents have an excellent understanding of the school. The vast majority of parents are very satisfied with the school and the way in which it provides an appropriate education for their daughters. Parents are, rightly, particularly appreciative of the time taken to meet an individual student's needs and they recognise that this is a particular strength which results from the very good leadership and management in the school. The school works very hard to involve parents both in school life generally and in the work of the students, by keeping them well informed about what their daughters are doing.
56. The regular newsletter, 'Highways', is informative and interesting. Annual records of achievement are good, usually giving a clear indication of each student's strengths and weaknesses within the different subject areas. In the best of practice, precise descriptions are given about the next steps for improvement. One significant omission is the lack of reporting on information and communications technology, as a discrete subject, within each student's record of achievement. Regular progress reviews, with a useful accompanying letter of explanation, give a very good general picture of effort and achievement.
57. Parents are actively encouraged to support the Home School Agreement. Regular consultations about aspects of school life, such as the behaviour policy and uniform, enable parents to feel involved in the process of change and development. Homework is used very well to support the students' learning, and home-school diaries ensure that parents have ample opportunity to be informed and involved.
58. There are clear lines of communication between home and school. An excellent initial opportunity is created for mutual understanding and sharing via the individual family interviews which are held with every student and her parents prior to enrolment at the school. Parents receive detailed information about their daughter's progress, both through written reports and through regular consultation meetings. They are also invited to attend Year 11 student interviews where post-16 study pathways are discussed.
59. Many parents are involved through the highly valued Friends Association which raises large amounts of money to support the school. Parents are also actively involved in accompanying students on some of the extensive range of school trips and visits, including foreign trips.
60. The school works exceptionally well to encourage parents' full understanding of, and involvement in, the life of the school. Parents' views are welcomed and the school deals effectively with any parents' concerns. This has created a distinct and valuable partnership.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

61. The headteacher of the school provides clear, visionary, leadership which helps staff focus on providing students with a broad, stimulating and challenging education which enables them to achieve good standards in all that they do. She is ably supported by her senior management colleagues and by an active, committed, governing body. The aims of the school are fulfilled, in that students are provided with opportunities to attain the best possible academic standards while at the same time developing their skills in a variety of fields. The broad curriculum and excellent opportunities for extra-curricular activities helps this aim to be achieved. At the same time, the school has a caring ethos which enables students to become aware of, and respond to, the needs of others. The school further provides many opportunities for students to develop their mental and physical qualities and to become increasingly independent, thus preparing them well to take their place in society. Teachers work hard to ensure that students develop their understanding of a range of moral and spiritual issues, though some opportunities for nurturing students' spiritual development are not fully exploited throughout the curriculum.
62. Senior staff in the school work well as a team to promote good levels of attainment and satisfactory levels of achievement. The members of the senior team have well defined, complementary roles which they fulfil efficiently and effectively. Each member of the senior management team is now linked to a subject area as part of a gradual move toward greater accountability through the evaluation of performance. Good progress is being made in extending the roles of middle managers (heads of departments and heads of years), especially through a systematic programme of monitoring of what is happening in the school. However, this programme is not yet sufficiently rigorous and focused on clearly defined criteria for improvement to be fully effective in improving quality and raising standards yet further.
63. The governing body is very effective in fulfilling its roles, both as supporter and critical friend. All its statutory responsibilities are fulfilled, with the exception of overall provision in information and communications technology, design and technology and a daily act of collective worship. An effective committee structure enables governors to play a full part in the life and work of the school. Governors are linked to subject departments and make regular visits, though the focus of each visit is not closely linked to the priorities for development within that department.
64. Governors are actively involved in all stages of the preparation of the school development plan and have successfully linked the budget planning cycle to this plan. The governors regularly question developments in the school and respond well to ideas and suggestions made by staff but are less likely to initiate new ideas. However, they are fully aware of both the strengths and weaknesses of the school, though they are more ready to celebrate these strengths than to highlight weaknesses. They do, however, ensure that the development planning priorities address the major current concerns in the school. Governors have been very active in ensuring that the recent building programme was undertaken in ways that would effectively meet the needs of the students and, in this aspect of the work, were most ably supported by the diligent and careful work of a deputy head.
65. Development planning at departmental level is less detailed than within the whole school development plan. This tends to limit the scope, within departments, for

responding to whole school priorities and, with one year timescales, does not help staff work on long term issues. In particular, departmental development plans rarely focus on improving aspects of teaching and this omission is related to an insufficiently evaluative focus within the roles of heads of department.

66. Good provision is made, within overall management, for the care and personal development of students. Heads of year effectively fulfil an important role in monitoring the students' personal development and they provide good leadership for their teams of tutors. The individual needs of students are known and regular reviews provide early indications of possible concerns. The systems for handling this work are well established and are very effectively managed. The special educational needs co-ordinator has set up efficient systems for identifying, assessing and supporting students on the register of special educational needs. Gaps in provision, for example for students with dyslexic tendencies, have been identified and appropriate action is already being taken. The targets written into individual education plans are in the process of being shared with the students.
67. The school is staffed by a team of well qualified teachers who work hard and have a strong commitment to students. The student-teacher ratio in the school, and the overall staff contact ratios, are close to the national averages. The good match of teacher qualifications to the tasks they undertake is a strength of the school, having a very positive impact on students' learning. Teachers are well supported by technicians in science, information and communications technology, design and technology and reprographics, and these support staff make a significant contribution to learning throughout the school. Other staff working in administration, catering and caretaking are friendly, helpful and efficient and their work adds much to the ethos of the school.
68. The school has successfully completed the first round of teacher appraisal and awaits guidance on the future format of this system. Departmental monitoring programmes now include professional development interviews and, given time, this aspect of the school's work will make a good contribution to the professional development of staff. Newly qualified teachers and new staff are introduced to the procedures of the school and their induction is managed well by a member of the senior management team. An effective partnership scheme between Canterbury Christ Church University College and the school concerning the initial training of teachers, is successful and is to the mutual benefit of both establishments.
69. Training priorities for staff relate to both school and departmental development plans and, where possible, to individual needs. The school makes efficient use of funds for in-service training. Whole school training days have recently focused on current priorities, such as literacy developments, the future shape of post-16 education and behaviour management. These have been effective in preparing staff for a range of new challenges. More training is needed, for middle managers, in the techniques of evaluative classroom observation.
70. Since the last inspection, considerable improvements have been made to the accommodation. A new building now provides high quality facilities for design and technology, religious education and information and communications technology. As these departments have moved into these new buildings, accommodation has been improved for other departments, such as history and science. In science, laboratories have been up-graded, refurbished and extended. All departments now enjoy good quality accommodation. The available accommodation is managed well

and both teachers and students make good use of the facilities available. Displays of students' work, and records of activities, enhance the appearance of the buildings and encourage students to look after the fabric of the school. The only significant aspect of inadequate accommodation relates to indoor facilities for physical education which limits the range of work possible.

71. The total expenditure per student in the school is lower than that found in many schools with sixth forms. The school spends a relatively large proportion of the budget on learning resources and this helps ensure that all departments have sufficient materials and equipment to meet the needs of the curriculum. Some funds are set aside each year for developmental activities and heads of department are required to plan and bid for these funds. This is an effective system, ensuring that identified priorities are appropriately funded. Progressively, the governing body and headteacher encourage a longer term perspective on resource spending and this has led to long term strategies, for example in the funding of computer provision in the school. The library is used well and has a large stock of books, though some are rather dated. The school is taking steps to review this stock. The librarian provides valuable help and guidance to students. A good careers library provides students with valuable information about opportunities in both higher education and the world of work.
72. The school's financial planning is careful and sharply focused on educational priorities. Governors regularly review spending patterns and check, through regular reports from the headteacher, on the impact of their decision-making. Priorities for spending are closely matched to development planning priorities. The school is careful to ensure that its decisions and practices are cost effective. Very good financial control is a strong feature of the school. Regular monitoring by a deputy headteacher, ably supported by administrative staff, helps ensure the smooth running of the budget. Funding for specific purposes is routinely channelled to the point of need. The school has undertaken significant work to bring about the effective use of a range of new technologies for day to day management, and for student monitoring and is continuing to explore further possibilities.
73. The school has made good progress since the previous inspection. Standards are now higher and the quality of teaching has been improved considerably. The accommodation now provides a very good teaching and learning environment. All the issues for action, identified in the past inspection report, have been effectively addressed, with the exception of full provision for a daily act of collective worship and the effective use of assessment information to guide planning. There is a high level of commitment to improvement, matched by a very good capacity to succeed.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

74. In order to raise, still further, the levels of attainment of all students in the school, attention should be given to the following issues:

Improve provision for information and communications technology teaching by:

- ensuring that there is full coverage of the National Curriculum Programmes of Study for all students in Key Stage 3 (paragraphs 3, 33, 63, 110, 152);
- ensuring that all students in Key Stage 4 follow courses which enable them to cover, and be assessed in, the National Curriculum Programmes of Study (paragraphs 6, 34, 63, 153);
- ensuring that all departments implement, as a matter of urgency, their plans to integrate information and communications technology into teaching and learning across all key stages (paragraphs 12, 110, 124, 139, 150, 165);
- making full use of dedicated, externally funded training to improve the knowledge, skills and understanding of all teachers (paragraphs 24, 157).

Improve the programme of monitoring and evaluation of teaching, by:

- providing training for all heads of department, and heads of year, in effective techniques of classroom observation (paragraphs 62, 69, 114);
- extend the programme of classroom observation, with a sharper focus on evaluative criteria, to guide teachers on how to improve (paragraphs 62, 85, 114).

Improve aspects of teaching by:

- providing training for all teachers in how to plan lessons which enable students to engage more productively in research, investigation, enquiry and analysis (paragraphs 27, 143);
- ensuring that the current good practice, for example in history, is shared among all departments (paragraphs 23, 85, 150).

Improve the quality and use of assessment, by:

- ensuring that all departments collect and record data and use it to link assessments to National Curriculum levels for students in Key Stage 3, sharing the good practice already in place in subjects, such as design and technology and English (paragraphs 28, 51, 83, 150, 163, 183);
- using data to track student progress and set clearer targets for them (paragraphs 51, 52, 102, 112);
- monitoring assessment procedures across departments to ensure consistency (paragraph 52);
- sharing good practice in student self-assessment to establish school-wide procedures (paragraphs 51, 101, 113).

75. In addition, a range of other issues should be considered by the school. The detail of these may be found in the paragraphs of the report indicated.

Ensure that the school fully meets its statutory requirements by:

- providing a daily act of collective worship for all students (paragraphs 38, 63).

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	182
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	56

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
7	36	39	17	1	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 students

Students on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	757	217
Number of full-time students eligible for free school meals	23	0

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	1	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	24	1

English as an additional language

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

Student mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	15

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	95.2
National comparative data	91.0

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 students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	1999	n/a	147	147

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	147	144	147
	Total	147	144	147
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	98 (100)	100 (99)
	National	63 (65)	62 (60)	55 (56)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	52 (98)	95 (100)	78 (83)
	National	28 (35)	38 (36)	23 (27)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	146	147	146
	Total	146	147	146
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	100 (100)	100 (100)	99 (99)
	National	64 (62)	64 (63)	60 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	98 (90)	99 (100)	80 (83)
	National	31 (30)	37 (37)	28 (30)

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	n/a	117	117

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Girls	115	115	115
	Total	115	115	115
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	98 (99)	98 (100)	98 (100)
	National	46 (44)	91 (90)	96 (95)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	60 (53)
	National	37.8 (n/a)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	0	n/a
	National		n/a

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	n/a	93	93

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	n/a	23.6	23.6 (24.3)	n/a	0	0 (0)
National	17.7	18.1	17.9 (n/a)	2.7	2.8	2.8 (n/a)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	School	0	n/a
	National		n/a

Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	1
Indian	6
Pakistani	1
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	5
White	957
Any other minority ethnic group	0

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 students excluded.

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	56.7
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.2

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	8
Total aggregate hours worked per week	237

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	77.5
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	27.2
Key Stage 4	23.0

Financial information

Financial year	1998-99
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	£
Total income	2 011 038
Total expenditure	2 041 907
Expenditure per student	2 249
Balance brought forward from previous year	110 725
Balance carried forward to next year	79 856

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	974
Number of questionnaires returned	300

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	52	41	5	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	62	35	2	0	1
Behaviour in the school is good.	45	48	4	0	3
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	54	13	2	0
The teaching is good.	50	47	1	0	2
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	39	41	15	3	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	56	38	4	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	83	16	1	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	34	49	13	1	3
The school is well led and managed.	63	37	0	0	0
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	59	38	1	1	1
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	45	45	5	2	3

Other issues raised by parents

Parents expressed their appreciation of the very good range of trips and visits for students, which were invariably well organised.

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

ENGLISH

76. The high level of student enjoyment in this subject is matched by high standards of attainment which show an improvement on those reported at the time of the previous inspection. In the end of Key Stage 3 national tests in 1999, all students attained at least the nationally expected level. This result was significantly above the national average for all schools. Performance at Level 6 or above was in line with the average for selective schools.
77. External examination results in GCSE show high levels of success. In 1999, in both English and English literature, the percentage of students attaining A* to C grades was well above the national average for all maintained schools and above the average for selective schools. In English, the proportion securing an A* or A grade pass was greater than the previous year and above the average for selective schools. As in 1998, the proportion of students gaining A* and A grades in English literature was significantly higher than the average for selective schools.
78. GCE Advanced Level English literature is a very popular course and results in the grade range A* to E are consistently above the national average for all schools and in line with the average for selective schools. In 1999, the percentage of students securing higher grade (A or B) passes was significantly higher than the average for all schools and for selective schools.
79. The evidence from lessons observed and from previously completed work, shows attainment for the majority of students at the end of both Key Stages 3 and 4 to be well above the levels expected nationally. At Key Stage 3, students show a high level of competence in speaking and listening, as they are encouraged to express their feelings in the context of whole class presentations, discussion, small group and paired work activities. Standards of reading, comprehension and response are very good, with students demonstrating a widespread enjoyment of literature and the ability to read aloud with confidence, fluency and expression. Written work is wide-ranging in topic, form, style and approach and most students are adept at matching the style and structure of their writing to its intended audience and purpose. For a small minority, at all levels of ability, there is scope to increase the quantity produced within a set time.
80. At Key Stage 4, students are increasingly competent in engaging the listener's interest with fluent, cogent, spoken contributions. Many offer independent opinions, challenge ideas and listen with discernment. Students' understanding of literature is developed, and interest stimulated, by guided, close reading of suitably challenging pre-twentieth century and contemporary texts, to which they show a deepening emotional response. The approach supports significantly the study of language. Written work is frequently of a high standard, with assignments displaying innovative, creative and sustained response, supported by a high level of technical accuracy.
81. In the sixth form, attainment is in line with the course expectations for higher grade success. The confident, fluent and perceptive oral contributions of sixth form students reveal a sophisticated awareness of both literary and social issues. The

level of close reading of Advanced Level texts is of a high order. In response to the challenges posed by teachers, students sustain analysis of demanding texts and can articulate argument, opinion and alternative interpretations. They are competent in their written work, much of which is perceptive, rich in relevant evidence and expressed in an appropriate style.

82. Throughout the school, re-drafting for improved structure and precision is encouraged, but students' writing skills and support for creativity would benefit from access to, and more structured opportunities to use, information and communications technology within the department. The development of students' spoken and written language is supported by the work in a range of curricular contexts and by their engagement with book and screen text, when seeking information in relation to their studies in other subjects.
83. Conscientious monitoring of students' performance shows, in relation to the levels of skill recorded earlier, that most make very good progress in their work over time, particularly at Key Stage 4. The minority identified as having special educational needs, or for whom English is an additional language, are supported well and attain standards appropriate to their specific difficulties. However, in a minority of lessons, the highest attaining students are not sufficiently challenged, for example by the provision of pre-planned extension tasks.
84. A consistently high degree of teacher commitment and subject knowledge contributes significantly to the high standards students attain and produces a quality of teaching which is never less than satisfactory, usually good, frequently exhilarating and occasionally inspirational. All lessons are planned diligently, resourced carefully and incorporate skilful classroom management techniques to facilitate effective learning. The most successful teachers ensure a constantly brisk pace and include planned questioning, and written tasks of differing difficulty, to consistently challenge the full range of ability within the group. In all lessons, students behave very well, are motivated by the tasks, work successfully in collaboration with others, respond well to their teachers' high expectations and share their overt enthusiasm for the subject.
85. Very effective leadership, efficient management, a co-operative team approach and honest evaluation support the department's commitment to improvement and development. The recommendation of the previous inspection to share good practice has been addressed and would be strengthened further by a more systematic approach to classroom observation. An enriched curriculum makes valuable contributions to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of all students, for example in the use of literature to explore a range of ethical, moral and social issues.

Drama

86. The school has a strong tradition of drama teaching and for the staging of high quality productions. Drama forms part of the English curricular experience for all students and, by the end of Key Stage 3, standards are in line with the nationally expected level for movement, but significantly above this level for oral expression, interpretation, characterisation, appreciation and appraisal. Ideas and characters are explored and communicated imaginatively, using a variety of techniques. Students demonstrate confidence when improvising and speaking and recognise that their experiences in drama significantly improve their oral skills.

87. An enriched English curriculum at Key Stage 4 effectively incorporates drama to support and strengthen many aspects of students' work, particularly their understanding and interpretation of set texts. Many elect to study a specialist GCSE drama and theatre arts course and results in this are higher than the national average for selective schools. Ideas are extended through role-play, scripted work and improvisation, supported by a good practical exploration of dramatic texts. Critical understanding and insight are tested against the varied problems presented by performance. Use of accents is well controlled and gesture, movement and empathy enhance characterisation. A high standard of practical work demonstrates conviction and imagination, with an appropriate use of humour.
88. GCE Advanced Level theatre studies is a very popular course and, in 1999, results were in line with the national average. Students demonstrate a competence in applied practical skills, both individually and within groups, and their creative work shows a good understanding of structure. Dramatic skills are evident in the detailed characterisation and stage 'presence' of individual monologues, and the use of accent and vocal inflection demonstrate flair and originality in the portrayal of characters. Students display an in-depth knowledge of some theatrical influences, conventions and styles related to the development of theatre, and the techniques of leading practitioners are reflected in their work. All show an appreciation of the roles of director and actor. The standard of performance of many students is very high, with work demonstrating originality, excitement and intellectual energy.
89. In all key stages, students respond well as collaborative learners, showing enthusiasm, ambition and a high level of concentration and theatrical discipline at Key Stage 4. Those on specialist drama courses demonstrate total commitment and dedication to improving their performance and are stimulated by high quality, imaginative teaching where discreet intervention promotes high standards of insight and analysis. The subject makes a powerful contribution to the personal development of students and to the work of the school.

MATHEMATICS

90. The standards achieved in mathematics throughout the school are very high. In 1999 the proportion of students attaining Level 6 or above in the national tests for fourteen year-olds was well above the national average. These students increased their attainment, on average, by two or more levels between Key Stage 2 and the end of Key Stage 3. Nearly a quarter of the students made gains of 3 or 4 levels. The department takes account of students' prior attainment and, with the results from other standardised tests, uses this information to predict their expected levels at both Key Stage 3 and GCSE. The three year trend is an improving one.
91. Evidence from lesson observation, discussions with students and an examination of students' books indicates that the achievement of students in Key Stage 3 is generally very high. High attaining students who have a particular gift or talent in mathematics are achieving very highly across all aspects of the subject. These students are challenged by the work. Examples were seen when a group of Year 9 students were working on trigonometry of the right angled triangle. These students were able to apply their mathematics in a variety of situations through tackling investigations and extension topics. Other students are equally challenged by the work and achieve well in relation to the national expectation.

92. At the end of Key Stage 4, the proportion of students achieving A* to C grades in 1999 is significantly above that achieved nationally for all schools and in selective schools. A similar pattern exists for A* to G grade comparisons. Over the past few years results have fluctuated somewhat, but the trend is one of improvement. Results are always well above the national averages. The work seen in lessons during the inspection indicates that high ability students are being challenged and stretched by their teachers. These students have good knowledge and understanding of the various aspects of the subject, as seen in a Year 10 lesson where students worked on a range of questions associated with the theorems of a circle. Middle and low attaining students produce good standards of work, commensurate with their various starting points. Another group of students successfully managed a project to measure the height of one of the school's buildings, using appropriate instruments and trigonometry. The quality of students' coursework for GCSE is very high. All students take GCSE examinations and their results indicate that progress made in all aspects of mathematics during Key Stage 4 is very good.
93. In the sixth form, the standards achieved at GCE Advanced Level are always very high. The number of students achieving A or B grades has risen over the last three years and, in 1999, was above the national figures, both for all schools and for selective ones. No student has failed to gain at least an E grade in mathematics for the past three years.
94. Sixth form students are provided with a considerable range of opportunities to continue with their mathematical studies. Students are well motivated and are enthusiastic about the subject. The standards they are achieving in pure mathematics are particularly high. Those students, for example, working on the principles associated with algebra and calculus, make very good progress. Students undertaking the statistics module competently apply the laws of probability and distribution functions to complex problems occurring in everyday life.
95. Throughout the school, students with special educational needs or those for whom English is an additional language, achieve standards commensurate with their prior attainment and make appropriate progress with their learning.
96. Students continue to develop their numeracy skills through wide application and generally good opportunities within mathematics. The department is evolving a programme to support the continued development of these skills, including mental arithmetic. In subjects other than mathematics, students develop and apply their numeracy skills to good standards. Students regularly apply their mathematical skills in science, design and technology and geography with confidence. They use number, percentages, time and interpret data presented graphically. There is, however, no co-ordinated whole-school approach to the development of numeracy skills, and this limits the potential of the school to respond to the national drive for improving numeracy, building on work currently being undertaken in the primary phase.
97. Since the last inspection, the mathematics department has improved its standards throughout the school. Achievement is never less than satisfactory at all stages and in virtually all cases it is good or very good, most notably in the sixth form. Such achievement is not confined to the top sets. For example, a Year 9 low-attaining set made substantial gains in their understanding of scatter graphs and correlation. The most effective learning occurs in lessons where students are actively involved,

through discussion, paired and group work. In these situations students learn to express their ideas, deepen their knowledge and develop a greater understanding of mathematics.

98. The quality of teaching in mathematics is very good overall and has a significant impact on the standards students' achieve and the quality of their learning. Teaching is never less than satisfactory. It is at least good in two fifths of lessons and very good or excellent in a further two fifths. Teaching in the sixth form is always very good and occasionally it is outstanding. The very good teaching is exemplified by well planned and structured lessons that move at a brisk pace. Teachers skilfully provide a mix of discussion, paired or group work, notes and practice and this variety underpins the high standards achieved by the students.
99. Where teachers' expectations are high, students are challenged by the work set. In the opening discussions of many lessons, teachers readily use responses from students to stimulate ideas and develop approaches to learning of the topic. This was seen in a Year 13 lesson, where students developed their curve sketching skills. Students are well motivated by the teaching they receive in the vast majority of lessons, and by the work provided, including homework. Students in a large Year 8 class worked enthusiastically on their information and communications technology skills through giving instructions to a 'pen' to construct geometrical shapes and their reflections. In lessons such as this, students sustain interest throughout, and the very positive relationships between students and teachers ensure that a purposeful working atmosphere is created.
100. The attitudes and behaviour of students are very good and considerably enhance their learning and the standards they achieve. In the majority of lessons, the pace is demanding and mostly matches the ability level of the groups. In the lower attaining sets at Key Stage 3, the pace of lessons is sometimes too demanding for students to have time to consolidate their learning and this limits their achievements.
101. In many lessons, teachers develop and assess students' understanding through discussion and the marking of homework. This is an effective strategy. Students in a Year 13 class, for example, each gave a short talk on a set topic. This effective learning technique provides them with opportunities to respond by asking questions of each other, to explore mathematical ideas and to link different aspects of mathematics. It is also an opportunity for the teacher to assess students' knowledge and understanding. However, teachers do not always pay sufficient attention to how and when assessment opportunities can be built into lessons. This is needed in order to provide teachers with a greater knowledge of what students know and can do, assist them in setting students targets for improvement and provide better information to parents.
102. Not all students are aware of the standards they are achieving and the progress they are making. The marking of work, although undertaken regularly by teachers, is not sufficiently diagnostic, particularly at Key Stage 3, to indicate to students what they need to do to improve. The lack of well developed self-assessment strategies for students in Years 7 to 10 limits students' understanding of their levels of attainment. Similarly, the lack of summary evaluations at the end of lessons means that there is insufficient focus for students on what they have learnt and, for teachers, on what needs to be planned for next.
103. Since the last inspection the quality of teaching has improved. All teachers have

very good subject knowledge which is effectively used through exposition and the questioning of students, generating a high level of interest and enthusiasm. Teachers now use a broad range of teaching strategies, but a lack of appropriate activities restricts the further development of students' independent learning skills.

104. The department is very effectively led and ably supported by a team of dedicated, enthusiastic and experienced mathematicians. Their working practices are generally of a very good quality and there is a strong team ethos, which helps support and sustain new members of staff. The department's development plan identifies key issues to be tackled, but does not set out any long term targets for raising standards. The current scheme of work is adequate but does not include sufficient detail on how to further broaden teaching and learning approaches. There is considerable capacity within the department to take forward the issues in this inspection report and to raise standards further.

SCIENCE

105. Attainment is well above the national averages for all schools in science at Key Stages 3 and 4 and in biology at Advanced Level. Attainment in Key Stage 3 National Curriculum tests was very high in comparison with national averages in 1999. Two thirds of the students improved their attainment by at least two National Curriculum levels from Key Stage 2 to Key Stage 3. By the end of Key Stage 3, students understand the order of reactivity of metals, for example, and can explain how this is applied in preventing rusting of steel. They can describe the role of the placenta when studying reproduction in humans. When studying light, students are able to draw ray diagrams through a glass block, identifying the incident, emergent and refracted rays. Investigative skills are good with opportunities to investigate the factors that affect pulse rate where they manipulate at least three variables. All students understand and can apply the principles of fair testing well.
106. In 1999, one group of students attained 100 per cent A* to C grades in the three separate sciences at GCSE. The rest gained similar results in double award GCSE science. GCSE results have improved steadily since the last inspection and are now very high when compared with national averages and are above average for similar schools. By the end of Key Stage 4, high attaining students understand and apply sterile techniques to investigate growth and control of bacteria, for example. All students can calculate molar masses and molar volumes. They have a very good understanding of the major systems in the human body and know that differences in organisms are brought about by genetic variation. They attain a high standard of experimental skills through a wide range of investigations. Good examples are the study of factors which affect the strength of an electromagnet, and factors which affect the rate of a chemical reaction.
107. Students have the opportunity to select from four Advanced Level science courses. Attainment in Advanced Level biology has improved steadily and is now in line with national averages for similar schools. In human biology, attainment is also in line with national averages for similar schools. Attainment in Advanced Level chemistry was in line in 1999, although numbers following the course were low. There were no entries in physics in 1999.
108. Attainment in lessons is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4. It is good in all aspects of Advanced Level biology and in experimental work in Advanced Level physics, where students are achieving well above national expectations.

Attainment is satisfactory in Advanced Level chemistry and human biology lessons. Students studying Advanced Level chemistry are currently not achieving standards of which they are capable.

109. Mathematical and graphical skills are used well across all years, indicating good collaboration with the mathematics department to ensure that formula work, complex graphs and data interpretation are carried out successfully. By the end of Year 9, students can draw lines of best fit. In Year 11 they can carry out calculations involving, for example, efficiency of transfer of electrical energy. In physics, Advanced Level students tackle problems relating to impulse and the ideal gas equation with confidence.
110. Literacy skills are developed adequately, with good emphasis on key words, spelling and interpretation of examination instructions such as 'outline, write, express, draw, sketch and state'. There is insufficient information and communications technology, in terms of resources and staff expertise and consequently students do not use information and communications technology for data logging, storage, retrieval and display in all years.
111. Students' attitudes to science are always very good. Their major strength is their enthusiasm and willingness to co-operate with each other in group activities. They show respect for each other's ideas and efforts and develop initiative and responsibility. This is not exploited sufficiently to raise standards and involve the few whose interest and motivation sometimes flags. Students are attentive, they concentrate hard and respond well to questions. The majority complete their homework and handle equipment with increasing care and confidence. However, they do not make risk assessments for their experimental work as teachers do not effectively plan for these. The many positive initiatives to attract girls into physical science have improved the uptake in Advanced Levels from 1998.
112. Teaching is good overall, with very good or excellent features in nearly four out of ten lessons. For example, in a Year 8 lesson where students obtained copper from malachite involving the four distinct processes of chemical reaction, filtration, electrolysis and displacement, excellent pace and high expectations of students produced excellent learning. The wonder on the faces of the students when the copper appeared was, in itself, worth the effort! Students could identify the changes in the different stages and predict the nature of the charges on copper particles during electrolysis. Throughout the lesson, students were challenged and responded very well. Another such feature was the detailed but precise feedback on errors in homework and tests in Advanced Level biology, with written exemplars being provided on how to improve. In many lessons, planning is good in setting out clear objectives, use of resources and use of effective homework, but careful timing of activities only occurs in a limited number of very good lessons. In biology lessons, excellent use is made of students to prepare and make presentations. Their work on constituents of blood, and the use of a game to revise key biological processes in Year 11, was an example of excellent teaching. Marking generally follows departmental procedures but the frequency with which it is undertaken is variable and teachers do not consistently use the outcomes well to match work to the needs of individuals in classes. This consequently slows the rate of progress of some students. Tests are not used effectively to provide indications of the level of students' attainment in Key Stage 3, nor to track students' progress against prior attainment. Target setting for students is good in the Advanced Level subjects but is not well used by all teachers lower down the school to improve attainment.

113. The quality of learning reflects the effectiveness of teaching. Acquisition of experimental skills is generally good and, at Key Stage 4, is very good as students develop their scientific understanding through well-focused long and short investigations. Investigations are not well organised, carried out or recorded in Advanced Level chemistry and this limits learning in this subject. In a significant number of lessons throughout the school, students' creative effort is challenged well, as in the field work on mown and unmown grass, and the research and presentation on chemical principles involved in ozone depletion, acid rain and the greenhouse effect. Students are aware of the increased understanding necessary in developing their studies during the sixth form from GCSE to Advanced Level. Due to lack of self-assessment and target setting, students do not always know how they are doing or how to improve.
114. This is a well-led department, which has made good progress since the previous inspection in changing the organisation and curriculum in Key Stage 4 to raise attainment. There are no effective schemes of work for Advanced Level chemistry and no clear record of experimental work for this course. Monitoring of teaching is now in place, but the cycle of evaluation, and consequent sharing of some excellent practice and identification of training needs, is not rigorous enough. Technical support is excellent, enabling all teachers to use experimental work. The head of department has regular meetings with technicians and there is an effective programme of professional development for these staff.
115. This is a good department where teachers are committed to high student attainment. They are willing to reflect on their work in order to bring about improvements. New management in the department has led to improved co-ordination and collaboration at Key Stages 3 and 4, though this has not yet spread to the sixth form, where some teachers work in relative isolation from their colleagues. Major health and safety issues have been addressed, but risk assessment is not always identified in schemes of work, lesson planning or in the technicians' guide, leading to potential hazards not always being identified. More attention is now paid to preparing sufficient work to challenge the highest attaining students in almost all lessons.

ART

116. The art department has maintained a consistently high level of success in examinations over recent years. In 1999 results were above the level of those in similar schools, with all the students taking art at GCSE achieving A* to C grades and 82 per cent of those students gaining A* or A grades. At Advanced Level, the department achieved results well above those in similar schools, with 75 per cent of students gaining A and B grades in 1999.
117. Inspection shows that students' attainment is good in Key Stage 3 and very good in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form. In Year 9, students showed imagination and innovation in their use of materials for three dimensional relief work. In a Year 7 lesson, students demonstrated their ability to collaborate and make valid evaluations of their own and other's work as they selected, combined and arranged their prints to create larger designs. In both cases, well prepared materials and very good individual support enabled students to focus on the creative aspects of their tasks.
118. At Key Stage 4, students are encouraged to explore the qualities of materials and

work on a variety of scales, including some very large architectural constructions in card. Sketchbooks are very well presented and include research work for projects and studies of the lives and works of a wide range of artists. The higher attaining students show their commitment by producing work in quantity and complexity involving far more time than is available in school.

119. In the sixth form, some figure drawings and paintings from life show exceptional vitality. Higher attaining students use materials with confidence and show a very good level of technical skill in presenting their personal responses, while lower attaining students present their work well but rely more heavily on secondary sources. Textile work shows a confident use of embroidery and collage, reflecting the influence of good support from the resident textile designer.
120. In all the key stages, strengths in students' work include the manipulation of a wide range of materials with a growing understanding of their particular qualities. The students are able to work on a variety of scales and show clear links with the work of artists in their own work. Although much research work is done about artists from different times and places, insufficient consideration is given to developing ways to help students retain the information and insights gained from this study.
121. The quality of teaching is very good in both Key Stages 3 and 4, and is excellent in the sixth form. Some lessons in Key Stage 3 are excellent because the teacher's knowledge and enthusiasm for the subject are very effectively transferred to the students. Similarly, in the sixth form, the quality of the advice and guidance given to students is precisely targeted, being based on a very perceptive understanding of their needs and a very secure teacher knowledge of course requirements. All lessons are well planned with clear targets, while the most successful lessons in all key stages are well structured, with very good introductions and a varied range of activities to ensure a good pace and maximum involvement of the students. The evidence of work in folders, and on display, indicates that most students make very good progress in their art work through the school, and well focused teaching ensures that students make very good progress in individual lessons. The open-ended nature of many of the projects allows the higher attaining students to work beyond the basic expectations and many are able to make excellent progress in exploring the materials or theme.
122. Students show high levels of interest, concentration and effort in lessons and relationships, both with each other and with staff, are very good and sometimes excellent, allowing staff to focus on teaching of individual students. A variety of strategies are employed to ensure that students with special educational needs are able to participate fully in art lessons. These students, and their needs, are well known to the staff, with the result that their attainment and progress are not significantly different from others in their groups.
123. Homework is set and marked regularly, with an emphasis on positive comments and directions for improvements. Sixth form students are encouraged to view the graded work of previous Advanced Level students to gain a clear idea of the standards of work expected of them. Students in Key Stage 3 and some in Key Stage 4 are less clear about the standard at which they are working as insufficient attention is given to improving students' self-knowledge of their attainment at these levels or to clarifying individual targets for improvement.
124. The art curriculum has been improved in both breadth and balance since the last

inspection through the development of information and communications technology and an expansion in the range of teacher skills. While information and communications technology is used extensively for research, it is still in the early stages of development as a creative medium, though some pieces of work show that it is already being used very creatively and incorporated into other processes and media.

125. The use of visits to galleries at home and abroad gives many students very good opportunities to view art at first hand. This is being supported by the development of the department's own web-site which includes links to major galleries as well as a gallery of school based work and information on courses. The positive impact of the permanent artist in residence has been consolidated through the inclusion of a part-time teaching role in Key Stage 3. A regular life drawing class enriches work in sixth form, redressing the imbalance between direct observational work and the materials and design-based work that is the strength of the department.
126. The department is very well led, with enthusiasm and a clear commitment to the further development of the subject. There is a very good balance of skills and experiences among the teachers and a supportive team spirit has developed. The head of department carries out a regular programme of monitoring and evaluation of teaching in art lessons, though these observations are general in nature and, particularly for the less experienced teachers, would benefit from a more specific focus.
127. The department has been re-located since the last inspection and now has excellent accommodation with good sized, well-lit rooms and a small, but currently adequate, studio for Year 13 work. Furniture and equipment are in very good condition and displays of high quality work create a very pleasant working environment within the art rooms and around the whole school.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

128. Attainment in design and technology is above average in Key Stage 3. Teacher assessed levels have been very good for the past three years. In the past there has been insufficient accommodation and resources to support design and technology courses for all. The school does not, therefore, meet the statutory requirement to teach the National Curriculum programme of study for all students at Key Stage 4. At this key stage, GCSE courses in graphics, textiles and food technology are optional. Results for all three subjects are well above national averages and in line with those for similar schools. Advanced Level courses are offered in textiles and graphics. Results have been good for the past two years but the size of groups is too small to make meaningful comparisons with national averages.
129. The well-planned curriculum for Key Stage 3 students gives them experiences in the use of a good range of materials and processes and fully meets the requirements of the National Curriculum. Students have good practical skills and show these in their well made wooden toys, an acrylic clock, copper jewellery and well designed garments. They know how to prepare and cook a range of dishes designed to meet the needs of a healthy life-style. Particular strengths in their work are the quality of research to prepare their assignments and the high standard of presentation. An area of relative weakness is three dimensional drawing skills, which need further attention. The department has produced an effective system to assess students' levels of attainment in each module. This style supports high achievement because

it provides the teacher of the next module with information from which to make judgements about progress. The system is to be refined to give more consistency in judgements and to analyse which skills need more attention and which are being unnecessarily repeated through the modules. Students are involved in the assessment process and have good guidance to show how well they are achieving and how to improve.

130. GCSE results improved significantly since 1998 and in 1999 all candidates entered for the examination have attained an A* to C grade pass. A particular strength is the quality of coursework. This is extensively researched, beautifully presented and makes excellent use of the good teacher knowledge base, which underpins the teaching in Key Stage 4. Examples of good quality work include designs for a wine bar, café or boathouse conversion, including well-constructed models. Students make garments, which they design, making their own patterns and following a theme such as India, which gives rise to some very creative and well-crafted work. Those students taking a food course apply their good knowledge of nutrition to choose food which matches the needs of particular groups of people such as diabetics. They set out a planned diet and adapt recipes skilfully.
131. Work from Advanced Level students is of a very high quality. Some coursework projects for textiles are exceptionally good, such as portfolios showing the history of fashion or an analysis of contemporary uniforms. The garments which students design and make illustrate skills and creativity of a very high order. Examples seen include a silk dress, skirts and a tailored jacket, all worthy of a professional designer. Graphics projects are equally good and students have produced a promotional brief, which enables them to show their skills in graphics and to apply them to meet the publicity needs of a business or of a charity.
132. Teaching is good overall. It is never less than satisfactory and is good or very good in around seven tenths of lessons. Long term and short term planning is thorough. Teachers have a very good understanding of the needs of examination courses, which supports high attainment. They have high expectations and students respond to this by working to the best of their various abilities. Staff are well qualified in the subject and pass on their skills and their enthusiasm in the many examples of good teaching. They set homework, which extends students' knowledge and understanding, and the quality of marking is such that it gives students a clear idea of what they need to do to improve. Textiles teaching is particularly good because the more difficult skills, such as pattern making, are taught in easy steps which give students confidence to master them. All staff have relevant safety training and there is a good awareness of the need for safe working practices.
133. The previous inspection highlighted a number of weaknesses, including assessment, some teaching and poor results in public examinations. Resources and accommodation were poor at the time. There has been significant improvement in all these aspects, enhanced by the new building and good leadership.
134. Students enjoy technology. The excellent new accommodation makes the department a very pleasant place to learn. Students are careful, well behaved and they work hard to make the best use of time available. The subject is well managed and teachers work together as a team, supported by the excellent services of the technician. Good use is made of visits to the design museum and to businesses

and industries concerned with food production, construction or design. The Advanced Level textiles students have gained skills from working with the artist in residence. The department has computers, which are, as yet, insufficiently used. These are to be linked to the network and will provide a further valuable support to the rising trend of attainment in design and technology.

GEOGRAPHY

135. The proportion of students attaining grades A* to C in the GCSE examinations in 1999 was significantly above the national average and above the average for selective schools. This was an improvement on previous years when the attainment was in line with that of selective schools nationally. The proportion of students gaining A* and A grades is in line with selective schools nationally but not as high as many other subjects within the school. At Advanced Level, attainment is very high. The proportion of students gaining A and B grades is well above that in selective schools nationally and the performance of students in geography is amongst the best in the school.
136. Attainment seen in lessons and in current work is well above national expectations and reflects the standards attained in public examinations. Towards the end of Key Stage 3, the highest attaining students produce work of a very high standard, especially in their coursework assignments where they show a sophisticated grasp of enquiry skills, which they use to form hypotheses about the topics they are studying. Students have a very good understanding of the impact of physical processes, such as earthquakes, on the lives of people in different places in the world. They understand the links between levels of economic development and the ability of countries to modify the tragic effects of such disasters. Most students have a very good grasp of geographical terminology, which they use appropriately in their writing and, to varying degrees, in oral work in lessons.
137. In Key Stage 4, students consolidate their knowledge and use of appropriate terminology and quickly learn new vocabulary, which helps them to understand more complex ideas and to express their knowledge and understanding of the work more precisely. The majority use complex mathematical techniques to help them analyse and explain geographical patterns, such as the relationship between levels of economic development in different countries and their use of energy. As a result of probing questioning from the teacher, students recall information and ideas from a range of places they have studied and apply them to new work. Their knowledge of the location of some of these places is less well developed. Fieldwork reports indicate that most students have developed their investigative and analytical skills substantially over the key stage and produce work of a high calibre.
138. Standards of work on the Advanced Level course are very high. Year 13 students have a firm grasp of the principles of both human and physical geography and the complex ways in which they interact. One group, for example, demonstrated a very secure understanding of the control held by multinational companies over world trade and the possible solutions available to poorer countries to take responsibility for their own development. Another group showed their grasp of processes at work in the atmosphere by presenting weather forecasts to their fellow students, based upon information of the air masses present over the British Isles. In both cases, the students made accurate use of terminology to explain their work.
139. Throughout the school, individual students make some use of information and

communications technology for research and to present elements of their work. However, students lack experience in the use of computer applications across a range of work in geography lessons and this limits their learning.

140. Almost all students make good progress in their learning, although sometimes the level of interaction in the lesson is a little beyond the understanding of the very lowest attaining students. These students generally make satisfactory progress as a result of individual support by staff. The small numbers of students with special educational needs or with English as an additional language, are well supported by teachers and achieve good standards in their work.
141. Students' attitudes to work, and their behaviour, are usually very good. They are very well motivated and show high levels of commitment to their work. They are overwhelmingly attentive, and well focused, and are willing to contribute fully to lessons when the teaching and the task demand it. A very small number of students are less well motivated and occasionally uncooperative, consequently making less progress than they should. Sometimes the pace of the work drops when students are engaged on lengthy tasks without clear guidance on the time available for such activities.
142. Overall, the quality of teaching is good. It was very good in over one third of lessons. It is never less than satisfactory and reflects an improvement since the previous inspection. In the most successful lessons, teachers pitch the work at an appropriately high level, give clear explanations, use appropriate terminology and pose challenging questions. Students respond well to the demands placed on them and develop confidence in the use of accurate vocabulary. They make significant gains in their knowledge and understanding of the work. Lessons are well planned and tasks are developed to match clearly identified learning objectives. The most effective activities require all students to participate fully and to contribute substantially to their own learning and to that of their fellow students. The content is generally stimulating and students are motivated by the imaginative slant teachers place on the work, and by the interesting and varied resources used. Most lessons proceed at a brisk pace and each element is carefully timed to ensure that students work quickly and that all planned work is achieved. Students respond positively to this pressure and have learned to work effectively and efficiently. Teachers give good constructive and critical feedback to students about the quality of their work, both orally in lessons and when marking their books. The quality and usefulness of marking is, however, better in Key Stage 4 and the sixth form than in Key Stage 3.
143. In lessons where teaching is satisfactory overall, there are some minor weaknesses which prevent students from achieving as highly as they might. The time in double lessons is sometimes not used efficiently because the pace is too relaxed, especially when students are engaged on extended tasks that lack rigour, or when a tight time schedule has not been established. As a result, students lose the impetus of the lesson and less progress is made. Occasionally the teacher's subject knowledge is not rigorously applied to asking sharply focused, challenging questions and, consequently, the standards of intellectual discussion in these lessons are not high enough to move students' thinking forward.
144. Good leadership is provided by the head of department who has a clear vision of the department's development needs and a lively enthusiasm for the subject. The experienced and well qualified team of teachers has a firm commitment to improvement and provides a generally stimulating environment in which the subject

is taught. Significant developments have been made since the previous inspection in providing fieldwork experiences for all students, and in developing a variety of assessment activities at all key stages. However, insufficient emphasis has been placed on relating day to day marking to levels of attainment, and to ensuring that students understand at what level they are working, and how their work can be improved. Some monitoring of teaching takes place in the department but this lacks the sharp focus necessary to help improve all teaching to the quality of the best. The use of information and communications technology was identified as a significant weakness in the previous inspection and this remains as an issue for development. Plans have been made to include the use of information and communications technology from September 2000. However, substantial staff training is required to ensure that all staff have the confidence and skill to teach the wide range of applications which will enhance the geography curriculum and meet statutory requirements.

HISTORY

145. History results at GCSE level are very high compared to the national average for all schools and above average for selective schools. In 1999, all the candidates achieved A* to C grades, with just over half of them gaining A* or A grades. High as these results are, there has been a decline in the proportion of top grades achieved over the last three years. By comparison with other subjects, students did as well in history as in the average of all their other subjects. Advanced Level results are well above average for selective schools and have shown an upward trend over the last three years, culminating in the highest entry in 1999, with almost four-fifths achieving A or B grades.
146. Attainment in Key Stage 3 is well above national expectations. Students are knowledgeable about the periods they are studying and have a good understanding of subject vocabulary. They are mastering the National Curriculum higher level subject skills. In Year 8, students use GCSE texts on the history of medicine to research an assignment on Harvey, for example, and are able to compare his work on the circulation of blood with the ideas of other medical scientists. Essay writing is well developed across the key stage and students learn how to plan their work, make judgements and substantiate them with relevant detail. The result is that, by Year 9, students are writing well argued, discursive essays on the causes of the First World War, organising them into short and long term causes, and showing the links between them. Students achieve a degree of sophistication in their ability to analyse historical sources. In a Year 9 lesson on Dunkirk, students were able to identify propaganda and explain the different interpretations presented by German and British newsreel at the time. In another Year 9 class, students showed discernment in selecting sources for their relevance to particular questions about the evacuation, and accurately assessed their usefulness and reliability. Students are independent learners who can research topics, make their own notes and present their findings in a fluent style, whether in group presentations to the class or in individual projects. These high standards are achieved through a rich variety of lesson activity, with the accent on challenging tasks, and regular opportunities for students to use their initiative and collaborate with other students in group work. Students enjoy the lessons and history is a popular choice when it comes to selecting subjects to study at Key Stage 4.

147. Attainment in Key Stage 4 is well above national expectations. Students have developed efficient note-taking styles and cover the topics thoroughly. Their coursework assignments on Roosevelt, for example, are well written, explaining in detail the reasons for his victory in the presidential election of 1932. In Year 11 lessons on the Cold War crises, students showed the detailed knowledge of events and breadth of understanding to be able to compare their relative importance for creating tension between the superpowers. Year 10 students looking at sources on Nazi propaganda were able to analyse their methods and evaluate the relative effectiveness of different forms of propaganda. Students display a high level of commitment to their examination work and make good progress on the course, achieving the standards expected, following their high level of attainment at Key Stage 3.
148. The standard of work in the sixth form is well above that expected nationally. Students' files are highly organised in their note coverage of the courses and their essays are well informed by wide reading. Students are encouraged to use their critical faculties to the full, thinking through issues and arguing the case for different points of view on events. Their discussions are intellectually stimulating, as in a lesson on the escalation of the troubles in Ireland after 1969, where students advanced well reasoned arguments for attaching blame to the nationalists, unionists and the actions of the British government. The style of teaching is intellectually challenging, whether comparing different historians' writing about the execution of Charles I, or making inferences from wartime propaganda film.
149. Throughout the school, students display very positive attitudes towards the subject. They respond well to the academic challenge and enjoy the regular opportunities to collaborate in groups on tasks. They develop the skills for independent study through researching topics, such as the Year 9 assignment on how people's lives changed as a result of the industrial revolution. An increasing number of students pursue their studies beyond Year 9 and display a mature approach to the work, taking responsibility for their learning and showing initiative.
150. The quality of teaching is very good in half the lessons and good in all others. It is particularly strong at Key Stage 4 and in the sixth form. Teachers have a very good command of their subject, plan their work in detail and are highly effective at equipping students with the knowledge and skills they need. There is a sharpness in their conduct of lessons, insisting that notes are concise and that time is spent thinking through key questions. They set challenging tasks that require students to use their intellectual ability to think critically, make judgements and support these with relevant facts. Their lessons contain a right balance between teacher exposition and student participation in activities that allow them to increase their understanding through interaction in small groups. Teachers are effective classroom managers who gain the full co-operation of their students in the learning process. Students rise to the challenge, use their initiative and are highly articulate when expressing their views. Classroom interactions between teachers and students are particularly stimulating and enjoyable. Teachers monitor students' progress carefully, although they prefer to assess by their own criteria, rather than using or developing the level descriptions of the National Curriculum. Use of information and communication technology has been irregular, as access to computers has been limited. The setting up of a new computer room on the same corridor has opened the way to development in this vital area.

151. The head of department models and encourages reflective, evaluative, approaches to teaching which successfully develop the potential which students have for their learning. The departmental development plan effectively focuses on teaching and learning strategies for challenging the most able students, broadening the subject's appeal and making the best use of homework. Since the last inspection the department has provided more support for lower attaining students within the school's high ability range, by giving guidance over assignments, promoting active learning in groups and providing extra assistance for individuals. As a result, the numbers taking the subject for examinations have increased and results have maintained an upward trend. In addition, the history department has developed the Government and Politics course at Advanced Level, which is proving successful.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY

152. Teacher assessment at the end of Key Stage 3 in 1999 indicates levels well above national averages. However, the school agrees that there was insufficient evidence fully to support this assessment. Lessons in information and communications technology are taught only to students in Year 7. Although all departments have produced well thought out plans to integrate the teaching of information and communications technology across the curriculum, these have yet to be implemented. The school does not, therefore, meet the statutory requirement to teach the National Curriculum programme of study for information and communications technology in Key Stage 3. There was not enough evidence of students' work to make a judgement about their attainment at the end of the key stage, but attainment of students in Year 7 is well above levels expected of this age group. They can use a spreadsheet to calculate, for example, the cost of buying snacks from a tuck shop. They turn their data into graphs and know how to alter the presentation to make their findings clear. Their good numeracy skills enable them to understand more complex calculations and they learn how to make the best use of automatic functions very quickly.
153. In Key Stage 4, a GCSE information and communications technology course is optional so that only those students who take advantage of this have sufficient access to computers to cover the statutory curriculum. For those following this course, GCSE results are well above national average and above the average for similar schools. By the end of Key Stage 4, students are independent users of information and communications technology. They are very well informed about the impact of the new technologies upon work patterns in society and have a good understanding of the ethical and moral issues raised by expanding the use of computers in society. Their level of technical knowledge is very good and they apply this to problem solving exercises, such as developing a management system and user guide for a music shop. Students' skills are well above the level required for good GCSE grades. For example, they understand and use a relational database which enables them to develop more sophisticated and reliable data management systems in a business context.
154. Those students following a modular Advanced Level information and communications technology course produce work of a very high standard. They have good programming skills, using visual basic, and complete detailed assignments on systems analysis and design. Homework is an integral part of their work and includes a task on producing a sequence of instructions for a robot. This supports programming skills. The particular strength of work at this level is excellent research, attention to detail and well-developed skills of analysis and evaluation.

155. Students enjoy using computers. They learn from each other and share their skills and knowledge readily. Students respond positively to good teaching and are very attentive listeners. They complete homework and take a great deal of trouble to see that their work is accurate and well presented. The information and communications technology rooms are well used by students during break and lunch times, and those who have computers at home make constructive use of them to support their learning at school. The good levels of motivation and interest are both important factors in the high achievement of those students who have regular information and communications technology lessons.
156. The marked improvement since the last inspection has been brought about through the appointment of a very well qualified and dedicated co-ordinator. His teaching is very good with excellent features, the essence of which is high expectations of students coupled with the skill of breaking complex tasks into simple steps. This enables students to understand difficult concepts. The brisk pace of teaching skills in Year 7 is well suited to higher attaining students and they learn so quickly that many are surprised at what they can do by the end of the lesson. This momentum is not maintained in Years 8 and 9, since not all subjects are consistently giving students opportunities to use their skills and develop new ones to build upon the good start made in Year 7. There is, however, some good practice in the cross-curricular use of information and communications technology developed through the co-ordinator's support of colleagues. In mathematics, a variety of software is used to support numeracy and geometrical skills. The art department is beginning to make excellent use of computers as an additional medium of creative expression. A number of subjects such as English and modern foreign languages use word-processing and others, such as religious education, make use of the Internet and CD-ROM for research. These examples are not sufficiently integrated to ensure that all students have regular, equal access to computers. Those who have computers at home have a distinct advantage, and they often use information and communications technology in GCSE and Advanced Level coursework to improve research and presentation. The popularity of information and communications technology is increasing and the school plans to introduce an assessed course for all students in Key Stage 4.
157. The information and communications technology department is very well managed and the many initiatives, such as the Ashford Metropolitan Network's proposed Intranet are developing quickly, thanks to the enthusiasm of the co-ordinator. The school has invested in a computer network system, which gives it a student to computer ratio in line with national averages, and the three well equipped rooms provide very good facilities for students to use. An added bonus for staff is the valuable support of the information and communications technology technician. In order to implement the plans for integrating information and communications technology into all subjects, there is a need for urgent staff training and further time for the co-ordinator to support colleagues. This should give teachers the skills they need to use computers in their own teaching. The assessment system developed for Year 7 provides a good basis for extension through Key Stage 3 when the cross-curricular use of information and communications technology is implemented.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

158. Students in Key Stage 3 learn either French, German or Spanish as their first foreign language, and all take a second language in Years 8 and 9. At Key Stage

3, standards in the first language are well above the national average of National Curriculum Level 4. In 1999, nearly nine tenths of students were correctly assessed at Level 5 or above, with some exceptional performances at Level 7 and above. Similarly, at Key Stage 4, standards in each language are very high and give clear indication of improvements in students' attainment. In GCSE in 1999, over 95 per cent of students gained A* to C grades, which is well above the average for all schools and above the average for selective schools. Standards in French have been consistently high over recent years and, in 1999, four out of five candidates gained A* or A grades. Standards have fluctuated a little in German and Spanish but, since 1997, have risen faster than the national improvement. Standards are high, too, in the sixth form. Results at GCE Advanced Level are well above the average and, for A to B grades, are in line with the average for selective schools. Results in all languages have improved significantly since 1997. In 1999, in fact, the proportion of students gaining A or B grades in French and Spanish was higher than the average for selective schools.

159. Attainment seen during the inspection accurately reflects that shown by the data for previous years. At Key Stage 3, in the first language, many students are well above average in all skills, and the work of the highest attainers is outstanding. The typical student has command of tense and other structures, writes accurate paragraphs describing house and family, for example, and understands relevant detail in taped recordings and text, mostly making accurate deductions about the broader meaning. The very highest attainers write fluently and creatively at length, using a wide range of structure. They include opinions and give reasons, and adapt verb endings and adjectives appropriately. Standards of speaking are above average, but could be higher. Students communicate effectively, exchanging personal information and performing roles accurately in role-play, but few speak with the flair and accuracy they show in writing, especially in French. Pronunciation is generally good, but in French is sometimes vague and speech lacks conviction. Most students, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language, achieve well. The most gifted and talented students progress very well by the end of the key stage. Progress in the second language is good or very good, and most students reach the average standards for the first modern language in only two years. Some students do not achieve as well as they should in speaking, because teachers do not encourage them to use the language spontaneously and from memory.
160. At Key Stage 4 attainment is well above average. Typically, students have a secure grasp of tense differences and can write accurately, at length, on narrative and descriptive topics. The highest achievers have a comprehensive understanding and use of a wide range of structure and tense. They interpret open-ended tasks with individual flair. They can, for example, sustain an argument from another's point of view, give accounts of memorable experiences, describe possible plans for the future, write book reviews and illustrate environmental and moral issues. Progress is good, resulting from effective teaching. Second language students in Year 10 make up the deficit compared with those who have studied the language for a year longer. Students with special educational needs achieve well in listening, speaking and reading. Overall, however, speaking is still relatively less well developed, as at Key Stage 3. Typically, students prefer speaking in pairs to speaking aloud, and there is insufficient attention to accuracy of agreements and, especially in French, to accent.
161. Attainment at Advanced Level is above average for the course, with students

averaging B or C grades in all languages. Speaking and listening skills are high. The most gifted students write fluently in a range of registers. They respond personally to literature, and to moral and social issues, and use the full range of tense and nuance. In speaking they can paraphrase, and improvise effectively, to defend a point of view. Most students achieve very well and sustain their very good progress of earlier years, building successfully on prior learning. They have a comprehensive grasp of authentic spoken language and access a wide variety of foreign text. Many express themselves without difficulty, for example in giving their views on the future of Gibraltar and the dangers of drugs.

162. Teaching is good at Key Stages 3 and 4, and very good in the sixth form. Overall, it is good or better in two-thirds of lessons and very good in a fifth. There was no unsatisfactory teaching observed. As a result, learning is good at Key Stages 3 and 4 and very good in the sixth form. Staff are proficient linguists and use their expertise well, especially in using the spoken language to develop skills, knowledge and understanding. They teach technical writing skills well, emphasising structure and grammar appropriately and ensuring that students organise copious reference notes to use as invaluable revision aids. They have very high expectations, especially in creating and managing appropriate conditions for learning. As a consequence, students acquire very good learning habits early in Key Stage 3, while effective study skills are firmly established by Key Stage 4. Students expect to work hard and do so, usually at speed. Relationships and behaviour are very good.
163. Teachers' planning is usually good with methods usually suitable for the learning objective. Sometimes, in Key Stage 3, there is insufficient planning for the individual needs of the most gifted and the lowest achievers. At each key stage, the quality of learning and pace of progress are sometimes affected when teachers are more concerned with covering the text book than designing tasks which are more closely focused on the learning objectives. Activities are most challenging, and time is used best, when skills are practised in short, timed tasks and used in combination, as, for example in Year 10 German and Year 11 Spanish classes. Where, on occasions, time is not used so well, there is too much teacher-direction, particularly from the text book, and students are not challenged enough either to understand text for themselves or to perform oral tasks from memory. Tape and video are used well, but the quality of overhead transparencies is not good and, although there are excellent examples of word-processed presentation of written work in a variety of themes, computer-aided learning is not yet planned and used systematically. The foreign language assistants provide very good help, with particular benefit for the learning of sixth form and GCSE groups and the lowest achievers. Marking is thorough, frequent and very helpful. This ensures that both teachers and students themselves are aware of strengths and weaknesses. However, students are not made aware of their National Curriculum levels early enough in Key Stage 3 and, although a start has been made in Year 10 German, students are not involved enough in assessing their own work, or in setting their own targets for improvement. Nevertheless, teaching is effective on the whole because it ensures that most students become independent linguists by the end of Key Stage 4.
164. The other significant strengths of provision are in the rich extra-curricular opportunities. Foreign links, including flourishing exchanges with each country, day visits to France, work experience in Year 12, are outstanding, and play a substantial part in developing students' interest in foreign languages and in promoting their

personal development. Planning for the needs of both the most gifted and lowest achieving students has improved since the last inspection, as has the provision and integration of reading schemes.

165. The faculty is managed well. There is a clear sense of direction, and routines and procedures are firmly established. For example, action taken following evaluation of examination performance over a number of years has resulted in a significant improvement in standards since the last inspection. The monitoring of teaching is in its early stages but currently does not sufficiently focus on the development of strategies to improve students' voluntary use of the spoken language, and raise standards of speaking from memory. There is a great deal of very good practice in the department from which all can learn but there is currently not a sufficiently strong collective ethos to ensure sustained improvement. The planning of teaching and learning is currently governed more by the content of the coursebook than by clear learning objectives. The application of information and communication technology is not yet systematically planned as a student entitlement, and it is thus not clearly understood how and where each student is to develop a range of skills.

Latin

166. Standards in Latin at Key Stage 3 are good. Nearly all students who continue to study the language in Year 9 receive the Scottish Short Course certificate by the end of the key stage. These students achieve very well in two years, making very good progress in using the basic constructions of an inflected language and the understanding of grammar functions. There has been no GCSE Latin class in Year 11 since 1995. In 1998, sixth form GCSE results were very good, with all three candidates gaining results in the A* to B range.
167. Current standards in class are similar to those shown by examination results. Students in Year 9 learn effectively, for example in building sentences using different forms of the imperfect tense in English, and translating back into the Latin form. They have a clear understanding of tense differences and functions. In Year 13, students were observed appreciating finer distinctions between parts of verbs, and immediately seeing linked English derivatives. Their vocabulary is wide and their grasp of grammar secure. It was not possible during the inspection to see the GCSE classical civilisation course being taught in Year 10. The sample of work shows a high level of commitment and enthusiasm contributing to very good standards.
168. Latin is important because of the role it fulfils in the Year 8 curriculum. Teaching is good, being undertaken with sensitivity, humour and rigorous, probing questioning, and provides a secure basis for students' standards of literacy and the development of their linguistic and thinking skills. In Year 9, it enriches the curriculum of the minority of students, about a quarter of the year-group, who continue to study Latin. Both Latin and classical civilisation make a strong contribution to students' cultural development.
169. Response to the last inspection has been good. The range of teaching and learning methods is broader and more motivating. In Latin, students act out scenes from texts, and in classical civilisation they work in groups on collaborative investigation. Learning has been enhanced by an increased use of information and communications technology, for example, the CD-ROM on Pompeii and the many web sites on the school's Intranet Classics site. Above all, curriculum provision has

been rationalised successfully and there are very encouraging signs of a growing interest in Key Stage 3. In three years, the size of the Year 9 class has increased from 12 to 31 students.

170. More appropriate timetabling arrangements would both consolidate the position of Latin at each key stage and avoid further losses to the time which students are permitted for their core subjects. It is not satisfactory that students should forgo any other lessons in order to study Latin. Nor is it possible for the teacher to commit more time out of hours. A necessary consideration will be to weigh the curricular value of classical civilisation against the provision of additional time for Latin, especially if numbers continue to grow.

MUSIC

171. Attainment in music in Key Stage 3 is above national expectations. The curriculum covers all aspects of the subject and students develop very well, particularly in performing skills. Regular playing in class, and an annual practical examination, encourage confidence and skill in performing, both individually and in ensembles. Throughout the school, but especially in Key Stage 3, students frequently compose for a particular purpose, such as 'something for my friend and I to play together'. This leads to eager activity in rehearsal and develops students' ability to play together. Most students have good understanding of the elements of music such as pitch, rhythm, texture and dynamics. These they can identify in the music they listen to and use in their own compositions. Elements of pitch, rhythm and notation are difficult to master and challenging to record on paper but the department has plans to use computer methods in order to help students with these aspects of the subject. Class singing is good and, by Year 9, students are able to capture the character of a song and show skill in interpreting it.
172. Attainment in Key Stage 4, for those students continuing their study of the subject, is well above the national average. In 1999, all ten students taking the GCSE examination gained A*, A or B grades, representing the best results since 1990. Historical knowledge and experience gained from the study of set works are applied in the composition elements of the course. As they listen to each other's compositions, students show a keen capacity to appreciate the musical achievement of their fellow composers. Ease with their instruments, a high standard of musical literacy and good knowledge of form and style are evidenced by impromptu illustrations of their ideas. Students are, for example, able to speak of an "impressive sequence of major 7ths on recorders".
173. Attainment levels are very high in all aspects of the Advanced Level music course in the sixth form. Students understand functional and non-functional harmony, they can use terms like 'negate' in a harmonic context and are fluent in discussing the modern idiom. They speak of composers using "unexpected sonorities and progressions yet retaining the framework of a courtly dance". Students can explain the devices they use and the works studied which influence their own compositions. They relate the works studied to their historical background and develop their understanding through references to art of the same period. Examples of this include a comparison of the polytonal dissonance of 'The Rite of Spring' to the form and colour of Munch's 'Scream'. Students have a good grasp of the idea of 're-working' and this helps to raise standards. For instance, a student re-arranged a piano piece for a string quartet because she thought the texture would be more

appropriate. Students are skilled in writing idiomatically for various instruments, a practice begun in Key Stage 3, where students exploit the qualities of the instruments they play themselves. Examination results at Advanced Level were, in 1999, the best for the past five years. Of the five students entered, three achieved an A grade, with the others achieving B or D grades.

174. The teaching of music, overall, is very good. In around four lessons in five it is very good or excellent. There is no unsatisfactory teaching in the department. This high quality teaching leads to very effective learning, with careful planning and preparation leading to lessons having good pace, clear goals and the use of deadlines, which in turn foster high levels of motivation for students. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and skills which they apply well in presenting music through a wide range of teaching styles. Effective changes in types of activity during lessons create a sense of balance, and maintain good levels of progression. Teachers provide good feedback to students about how well they are doing and what they need to do to improve still further. Expectations of what students can achieve are high and teachers take great care to match the tasks to the differing levels of prior attainment of individual students.
175. The department is well led and managed. It benefits from the identification of clear targets for improvement, especially regarding the need to ensure that the two music rooms are well equipped and that the potential for the use of computer technology is fully embraced. Two hundred students receive instrumental tuition from peripatetic teachers. The quality of this tuition varies from satisfactory to excellent. Music makes a powerful contribution to the extra-curricular provision in the school. About a quarter of students in the school participate enthusiastically in a wide range of choirs, music groups and a range of performing arts productions. Some groups, such as the chamber choir, have received national and international acclaim and the school's folk group is in great demand locally. These performances and productions add a powerful dimension to students' personal, social and cultural development.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

176. In July 1999, the school entered twenty five students for the GCSE examination in physical education. All students gained A* to G grades, with almost nine-tenths gaining A* to C grades. This is an improvement on the pass rate in previous years and these results are significantly better than the pass rate nationally. Thirteen students were entered for Advanced Level physical education in 1999. Over nine-tenths achieved A* to E grade passes and three quarters of students gained A* to C grades, which is well above the national average.
177. The overall levels of attainment in games, gymnastics and dance at end of Key Stage 3 are in line with national expectations overall. In gymnastics, the students in Year 7 have a limited range of skills. Most are able to demonstrate simple twists, turns and balances but only a few can perform them with fluency and accuracy. In Year 8, a small number of students are able to perform handstands and balances requiring a good understanding of tension, but the majority choose less demanding skills when putting together sequences of movement using balances. In games, students throughout the key stage take part confidently and display a range of skills which they generally perform with accuracy and understanding. In hockey, students are beginning to create space in a game and use it productively. They throw and catch well in netball and understand the footwork rule. Attainment is at least in line with expectations with a significant number of students displaying levels of skill

which are above average.

178. At the end of Key Stage 4, attainment is also in line with expectations, with a few students, particularly those in examination groups, achieving higher standards. Appropriate levels of skill development are clearly evident in athletics and health related fitness. Students can analyse the performance of others and make perceptive comments on how to improve. In health related fitness, students are gaining an understanding of fitness issues and practices and some are beginning to create their own fitness programmes. Students representing the school in school teams reach a very good standard. Many taking part in extra-curricular trampolining and preparing for competition show very high levels of control and agility.
179. Students in the sixth form taking an Advanced Level course reach standards which are well above national expectations in theory lessons. Folders of work are of high quality, detailed and well presented. Prepared presentations, for example on psychomotor abilities, are very good and provide challenge as well as information for the other members of the group.
180. Students' attitudes to physical education are very good. Students are highly motivated and work hard. GCSE and Advanced Level students, in particular, contribute fully to discussions. Students of all ages co-operate well in group and pair work and are very tolerant of each other's strengths and weaknesses.
181. Teaching is satisfactory overall, with two thirds of the lessons being good or very good. Where the teaching is less effective, the pace of the lesson is slow and undemanding. Progress in skill development and in ideas is insufficient because the information on how to improve is not taught clearly. In the vast majority of lessons, the choice and content of the work ensures that students sustain interest and involvement for whole lessons. In hockey, for example, practices to improve students' ability to hit the ball begin with standing hits, continue with dribbling and hitting and finally include receiving and stopping the ball before aiming at a goal. Teachers interact well with students of all abilities and provide a varied and balanced range of activities. Lessons start in a quiet, orderly manner and objectives are made clear. Safety is a high priority and students are reminded of the safe practices, for example in javelin throwing, long jump and in handling apparatus in the gymnasium. National Curriculum requirements for students to plan, perform and evaluate are written into many of the lessons. In the health related fitness lessons seen in Key Stage 4, students are not given sufficient opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning through planning independently to a given brief.
182. The curriculum meets statutory requirements, but the school continues, as at the last inspection, to be restricted in what it can offer to students because of the limits of the indoor facilities. The sixth form provision is only for examination students and, as at the last inspection, there are no opportunities for the majority to take part in physical education. There are very good opportunities, taken up by a high number of students, for extra-curricular activity, for example in dance, trampolining, netball, hockey, golf and summer games.
183. The department is well-managed, with established routines and expectations about behaviour, dress and participation, which the students understand and accept. Department documentation is extensive and well presented. Assessment procedures are not sufficiently rigorous to provide students with guidance on how they can raise their standards in planning and performing. The department

members work well together, support each other and show a strong commitment to the students. There is mutual benefit from the involvement of the student teacher. Insufficient attention is paid to the effective sharing of good practice, particularly regarding a planned focus on different approaches to teaching, linked with the impact of each on students' learning.

184. Standards and the quality of much of the teaching have been improved since the last inspection. Examination results have risen significantly and are now well above those of other schools in the country.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

185. Students achieved outstanding results at GCSE in religious education in 1999. In the previous two years they were above the national average for selective schools, but last year 32 of the 37 candidates achieved either A* or A grades. Students did better in religious education than in the average of all their other subjects. Advanced Level results have not shown the same consistency. In the three years that students have been entered for the examinations, 1998 stands out for high achievement, with 100 per cent pass rate and with well over half of candidates achieving grades A or B. Seven students took the examination last year and their results were below the national average for selective schools, although close to teachers' expectations from their performance over the course.
186. Attainment at Key Stage 3 is well above national expectations. Students make good progress over the key stage, building up their knowledge of beliefs and practices in Christianity, Hinduism and Islam. Regular assessments and the practice of students reviewing their own progress and setting themselves targets are assisting their progress. Year 7 students revising for examinations showed good understanding of key words from the three religions. Year 8 students were able to apply the prophetic words of Amos to injustice in the modern world. Students are able to reflect on the teachings of the different faiths and formulate their own views. For example, Year 9 students in a lesson on Muslim attitudes towards family life were able to apply the faith principles to case studies requiring decisions about care of children and elderly relatives, and could state their own views on family responsibilities. In class discussion, Year 9 girls demonstrated a mature approach to moral issues surrounding relationships. Their written assignments on attitudes towards contraception show understanding and the ability to compare and evaluate the teachings of different faiths. Students express their own views creatively in Year 8 poems on injustice and Year 9 orders of service for a wedding ceremony. The quality of their written work is high, reflecting the articulate way in which they state their views in class discussion.
187. Attainment at Key Stage 4 is well above average on the GCSE course and is evident in the quality of students' coursework assignments. Students are able to compare the teachings of Christianity and Islam, weigh up their views on moral issues and come to their own reasoned conclusions. In a Year 11 lesson brainstorming ideas for an essay, students showed how lively minded they are, advancing many ideas for and against the proposition that the world would be a better place if everyone were a believer. Year 10 students discussing funeral services displayed the same quick understanding of religious ideas behind the ceremonies. Progress over the course is good.
188. Although students have only one single lesson a week to cover the statutory

requirements for religious education, the quality of the teaching is such that they are achieving standards of work that are in line with national expectations for able students. Teachers present the religious views on moral issues in a form that facilitates group and class discussion. For example, in a Year 11 lesson on abortion, groups were given different briefings on various religious and humanist perspectives which they were able to assimilate and use to present the case for a particular faith to the whole class. There is little time for written work, other than a brief note to record the nature of the discussion, and this tends to slow progress.

189. In the sixth form, Year 13 students following the Advanced Level course are working to a good standard, their level of attainment being in line with what is expected nationally of Advanced Level students at selective schools. Their detailed files show good progress over the course and their essays demonstrate the level of scholarly criticism and evaluation of argument needed to secure higher grades. In a revision lesson, students sharpened their examination technique by pooling ideas for answering questions on miracles, each student having prepared an outline answer to a question from a past paper. Statutory requirements for religious education for all sixth form students are being met through a popular and effective programme of day conferences on subjects such as crime and punishment, world conflict and issues of health and healing.
190. Religious education is a popular subject in the school. Students find the lessons enjoyable because of the many opportunities to participate in discussion and to express their views. The numbers choosing religious education as an option for GCSE are growing. Students adopt mature and sensitive attitudes to the issues under discussion at all levels. In particular, the Year 10 reflections on suffering and death, both in GCSE and general religious education lessons, showed students' sensitivity and readiness to share experience and express their feelings. Teachers create the right atmosphere in which students can explore ultimate questions about human mortality.
191. The quality of teaching is very good in a third of lessons and good overall. It is particularly effective in Key Stage 4. Its strength lies in the specialist subject knowledge of the teachers and their ability to make the subject relevant to the experience of their students. They do this by using a variety of teaching methods to engage students' interest, from role playing Old Testament stories in Year 8 to serious group discussion of moral issues in Key Stage 4. Students learn well from the balance of teacher presentations and student tasks. Teachers enjoy very good working relationships with their students and manage them well in group activities.
192. The head of department gives a good lead on the development of the subject and there is a strong partnership among the teachers, sharing ideas and resources. As yet there is no formal observation of teaching, which would serve to facilitate the greater sharing of expertise. Staff have taken the initiative over training in information and communications technology and have set up a religious education Intranet site with access to a lot of suitable material for students to research topics on different religions. The recent availability of the new computer room makes it more feasible for the department to use information and communications technology now as a resource for learning.
193. Since the last inspection, more time has been agreed for sixth form religious education conferences but no extra time has been allocated to Key Stage 4, where students have half the recommended forty hours a year. GCSE results are amongst

the best in the school but the fluctuating Advanced Level results have been a cause for concern. The department has put in place strategies to improve consistency of performance at this level. The most notable improvement is the recent move into new purpose-built accommodation, which affords all the facilities needed by this growing department.