

INSPECTION REPORT

CHATHAM GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR BOYS

Chatham, Kent

LEA area: Medway

Unique reference number: 118797

Headteacher: Mr L D Marshall

Reporting inspector: Mrs S D Morgan
1355

Dates of inspection: 4th – 8th February 2002

Inspection number: 187773

Full inspection carried out under section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Grammar (selective)
School category:	Community
Age range of pupils:	11-18
Gender of pupils:	Boys 11-16 years Mixed 16-18 years
School address:	Holcombe Maidstone Road Chatham Kent
Postcode:	ME4 6JB
Telephone number:	01634 830083
Fax number:	01634 826230
Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr S Radlett
Date of previous inspection:	April 1996

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INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
1355	Mrs S Morgan	Registered inspector		<p>What sort of school is it?</p> <p>What should the school do to improve further?</p> <p>The school's results and pupils' achievements</p> <p>How well are pupils' taught?</p>
9537	Mrs C Marden	Lay inspector		<p>Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development</p> <p>How well does the school work in partnership with parents?</p> <p>How well does the school care for its pupils?</p>
8002	Mr L Farraway	Team inspector	<p>English</p> <p>A-level English</p> <p>English as an additional language</p>	
1292	Mrs V Foster	Team inspector	<p>Mathematics</p> <p>A-level mathematics</p>	
3242	Dr M Newman	Team inspector	<p>Science</p> <p>A-level biology</p>	
2501	Ms R Allison - Smith	Team inspector	<p>Art and design</p> <p>A-level art and design</p> <p>Equal opportunities</p>	How well is the school led and managed?
22491	Mrs L Small	Team inspector	<p>Design and technology</p> <p>A-level design and technology</p> <p>Information and communication technology</p>	
8292	Mr J Lace	Team inspector	<p>Geography</p> <p>A-level geography</p>	

14633	Mrs J Bannister	Team inspector	History A-level history	
15075	Mr B Stephens	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages A-level German	How good are curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
15208	Mr A Briggs	Team inspector	Music	
30800	Mrs B Colley	Team inspector	Physical education A-level physical education	
10761	Mr P Willan	Team inspector	Religious education Special educational needs A-level sociology	
2739	Mr I Benson	Team inspector	A-level psychology	
27407	Mr B Stoneham	Team inspector	A-level business studies	
2496	Dr A O'Sullivan	Team inspector	AVCE Leisure and recreation	
23880	Mrs O Hall	Team inspector		
20767	Mr J Royle	Team inspector		
27662	Ms E Schofield	Team inspector		

The inspection contractor was:

e-Qualitas Limited
Langshaw
Pastens Road
Limpsfield Chart
Oxted, Surrey
RH8 0RE

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Chatham Boys' is a grammar school of average size with 959 students in Years 7 to 13. The school has a mixed sixth form. Of the 232 students in Years 12 and 13, 50 are girls. Over the last six years the school has become increasingly popular with parents and is oversubscribed. The school roll has increased substantially and a significant number of new staff have been appointed. Overall, students' attainment on entry into Year 7 is well above average, and above average into the sixth form. The percentage of students who are known to be eligible for free school meals is well below the national average, at just over four per cent. The socio-economic circumstances of families are generally above average. Over four per cent of students have been identified as having special educational needs, a well below average proportion. These students have a range of needs, with most having learning and/or emotional and behavioural difficulties. The proportion of students with a statement of special educational need is well below average. A high proportion of students is white. The proportion who speak English as an additional language is a little higher than most schools, but very few are at an early stage of learning English. The school is taking part in initiatives, such as the local Education Action Zone and has gained Language College, Sportsmark Gold and Investors in People status.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

The school provides a sound education. In relation to their attainment when they enter the school students' GCSE results are good. Students develop excellent attitudes and are making satisfactory or better progress in almost all subjects. Teaching is satisfactory overall and good in the sixth form. This is reflected in sixth form examination results which have shown particular improvement since the last inspection. The headteacher and governors are providing good leadership and management. The school provides satisfactory value for money.

What the school does well

- Very high standards in end of Year 9 national assessments for English, mathematics and science and in GCSE examinations.
- Above average standards at A-level.
- Effective development of very good relationships and positive attitudes and behaviour which support students' learning.
- Very good promotion of students' personal development, for example by providing opportunities to take responsibility and participate in a wide range of extra-curricular activities.
- Good leadership and management of the headteacher and governors, focused on improving standards in a caring and supportive environment.

What could be improved

- Provision for art and design throughout the school and for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form.
- Some teachers' expectations of the highest-attaining students and the range of teaching methods used in some lessons.
- Some areas of accommodation which do not provide satisfactory learning environments.
- The library which is small and does not contain sufficient books of good quality to support students' learning.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

When the school was last inspected in 1996 it was overcoming the effects of reorganisation proposals, which had led to lower numbers of students applying for entry. Since that time the number of students has increased substantially. Satisfactory improvement has been made overall with good improvement in the sixth form. The quality of teaching has improved, which is having a positive impact on standards.

Most of the issues mentioned in the previous report have been systematically dealt with. For example, standards have improved and development planning is more effective. However, whilst improvements have been made to assessment procedures, the information gathered still needs to be used more effectively to help staff plan the curriculum. The school still does not meet the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form.

STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by students at the end of Year 11 and sixth form students at the end of Year 13 based on average point scores in GCSE and A-level/AS-level examinations.

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A	A*	A*	C
A-levels/AS-levels	A	C	B	

<i>Key</i>	
very high	A*
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

GCSE results have shown improvement over the past five years. The table shows that the results achieved by all students were in the highest five per cent at GCSE compared with schools nationally. The trend of improvement in GCSE grades is above the national rate. Over the last two years results have been very high in comparison with the national average. Where comparisons are made in this report with similar schools, these refer to the small number of selective schools in the country. Medway selection procedures admit around 30 per cent of each age cohort to its grammar schools, a much broader ability band than in other areas. Similar school measures are therefore of limited value. The school's GCSE results in 2001 were average using this comparison. The results for individual subjects varied. Comparing students' results in each subject shows that they did relatively well in English language and literature, mathematics, business studies, French, geography and history. They did less well in chemistry, design and technology and physical education. The school achieved almost all the targets for GCSE results in 2001, which had been agreed with the local education authority and has set suitably challenging targets for 2002. Current standards are broadly similar. Students' achievements are good overall. However, the core provision for the study of religious education in Years 10 and 11 is unsatisfactory. Students do not attain the standards required by the local Agreed Syllabus because the amount of curriculum time allocated to the subject is insufficient.

Overall, the school's results in the national assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were very high and results have been consistent for several years. The 2001 results in English, mathematics and science were very high. Compared with similar schools, results at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well below average. Overall, when students enter the school their levels of attainment are well above average in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Current standards reflect the 2001 results. Standards in almost all other subjects, as observed in lessons and through recorded work, are above average. Students' achievements overall are satisfactory in relation to their starting points. In art and design, students do not achieve as well as they should because too much work does not show progressively improving standards or reflect the standards students' achieve in their other subjects.

In the sixth form, standards are above average overall and most results are at least in line with predictions based on GCSE results. Students are achieving satisfactorily, both those who have come directly from Year 11 and new entrants to the sixth form. However, in art and design students in Year 13 have made insufficient progress since taking the AS-level examination.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent. Students are very committed to achieving well. They work hard, both in their lessons and during their own time. This makes a significant contribution to the standards they attain. Students enjoy coming to school and take advantage of the wide range of extra-curricular activities the school provides.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Students behave very well in all aspects of school life. They are polite and move sensibly around the school site. In lessons, students are quick to respond to instructions. The students are a credit to themselves and the school. The rate of exclusions is low.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Students care for each other and younger students appreciate the help they receive from older students. Students respect their teachers and value the support that they give them.
Attendance	Very good for all students including those in the sixth form. It is well above the national average, with virtually no unauthorised absence.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Satisfactory	Satisfactory	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.

The quality of teaching has improved since the time of the last inspection with a significantly higher proportion of satisfactory and good teaching, and particular improvement in the sixth form. This is having a positive impact on the standards attained. The teaching observed was most effective in Years 8 and 10 and the sixth form. Teaching was satisfactory or good in almost all subjects. Overall, it was good in English and satisfactory in mathematics and science. However, there are weaknesses in the teaching of art and design in Years 7 to 9 and in the sixth form. Teachers' subject knowledge is a strength throughout the school. This, coupled with students' very good attitudes and willingness to learn, enables them to make progress even in lessons where teaching has some weaknesses. This is evident particularly in Years 10 and 11 and the sixth form. Students want to learn and put considerable effort into their studies both in and out of school. Teachers' management of students is also a strength, as is the good use made of support staff and a range of resources. The teaching of basic skills is satisfactory throughout the school. Most teachers place appropriate emphasis on developing individual research skills together with an understanding of subject specific vocabulary. However, few teachers plan opportunities for students to apply their numeracy skills in subjects. Sufficient opportunities are provided for students to apply their information and communication technology (ICT) skills across the curriculum. Lessons that had weaknesses often lacked sufficient challenge for the highest-attaining students and this resulted in these students making insufficient progress. In most lessons, teachers provided work that met students' needs.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good in most respects. The statutory curriculum is in place for all subjects, except religious education in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. The range of extra-curricular activities is very good and they are well attended. A satisfactory programme of personal, social and health education is provided. Careers education is satisfactory. The community makes a very good contribution to students' learning and the school has very effective links with partner institutions.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. All statutory requirements are met. The information on all students is available to teachers. This, together with the targeted help from support staff, enables students to make good progress.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Good. The students who learn English as an additional language are given appropriate support.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good. The school promotes students' personal development very well. Moral and social development are strongly promoted. Spiritual and cultural development are good.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Good support for students' academic and pastoral needs. Teachers know the students very well and their support contributes to students' achievements. Assessment data is used to set targets and track progress. All groups are valued and integrated into the school community, including girls in the sixth form.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	The school has a very positive partnership with parents. It values their opinions and acts on their suggestions. Parents are very supportive of the school and involved in their children's learning. The annual reports to parents do not give enough information about progress in subjects and targets are too vague.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Good. The headteacher is a good leader who has been instrumental in enabling standards in the main school and the sixth form to improve and the school to gain in popularity. The senior management team and those with responsibility for subjects and personal development, manage day-to-day tasks effectively. Several whole-school developments have been managed well, leading to satisfactory improvement since the last inspection.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Well. The governing body has a very good understanding of the school, what it does well and where improvements are needed. Governors take their role of critical friend seriously and ask challenging questions of the senior team and middle managers. They have a very good understanding of the challenges the school faces and they use the information to prioritise spending. They fulfil their statutory responsibilities well, with the exception of ensuring that statutory requirements for religious education are fully met.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Good. Those with management responsibilities evaluate the quality of teaching through a regular programme of classroom observations. Good monitoring systems are in place to track students' personal development and their attendance. The information gathered through monitoring students' achievement is not yet used rigorously enough to adapt and improve teaching and learning styles.
The strategic use of resources	Good. The governors and the headteacher have been very effective in planning for, and enabling, the school to grow and in helping it to gain specialist school status. They have been effective in improving the quality of accommodation and are continuing to plan imaginatively for further improvements. However, overall accommodation still remains inadequate. Spending is directly related to the good whole-school improvement plan and systems for monitoring expenditure are effective. The school has made good progress in developing best value principles and applies these rigorously. Overall, staffing and resources are satisfactory. The school has recruited new teachers and employs effective strategies to ensure the staff team is qualified to meet curriculum demands. The school library is inadequate, both in size and in the range of books available.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Their children like school and make good progress.• Behaviour is good and the school helps their children become mature and responsible.• Teaching is good and the school expects their children to work hard and achieve their best.• The school works closely with parents and keeps them informed about how their children are getting on.• They feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.• The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons and their children get the right amount of homework.• The school is well led and managed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• No significant issues were raised.

Parents expressed considerable satisfaction with what the school provides and what their children achieve. The inspection team agrees with almost all parents' positive views but found teaching to be satisfactory overall rather than good.

ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

CHATHAM GRAMMAR SCHOOL FOR BOYS

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of this 11-18 grammar school is large with 232 students on roll. Of these students, 50 are girls. The number of students in Year 12 is substantially greater than in Year 13 and numbers are set to increase further. Very few students are from ethnic minority communities. All students speak English well. The school provides a range of A and AS-level subjects and currently offers one vocational course. About four-fifths of students from Year 11 continue into Year 12 and a third of those entering the sixth form are from other schools. Taking all students' prior attainment into account the ability of those entering Year 12 is above average. Almost all students remain in the sixth form for a two-year programme leading to A-level. The general level of qualification for entry into the sixth form is 5 A*-C grades at GCSE, with B grades in some specified subjects.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a good and cost-effective sixth form which meets the needs of its students well. Students can choose from a wide range of AS and A-level courses as well as an AVCE course which adds breadth to the curriculum. The school provides a supportive environment in which their personal and social development are supported well and very good attitudes to learning continue to develop. Examination results have improved since the last inspection, when they were below average, and are now above the national average. Students' achievements are satisfactory. Guidance, support and monitoring of students' progress are good. Teaching in the sixth form is good overall, and very good in some subjects. Leadership and management are good and this has led to improving standards.

Strengths

- Above average standards at A-level.
- Teaching is good overall and this enables students to learn well.
- Guidance, support and monitoring of students' progress are good.
- Students have very positive attitudes towards their studies. They are confident, hard working and enjoy being in the sixth form.
- The leadership and management of the sixth form are good and have been effective in improving standards.

What could be improved

- Provision for art and design and religious education.
- The library which is small and does not contain sufficient books of good quality.

The areas for improvement will form the basis of the governors' action plan. Strengths and areas for improvement in individual subjects are identified in the sections on individual subjects in the full report.

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

The table below shows overall judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses that were inspected in the sixth form. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Just satisfactory. Current standards are broadly in line with the national average and higher than previous A-level results. Teaching, learning and students' achievements are now satisfactory because of teachers, secure subject knowledge and students' good attitudes.
Biology	Satisfactory. Attainment in examinations exceeds national expectations. Numbers taking the subject have risen markedly since 2000. Teaching and learning are sound. There has been good improvement in the scheme of work and rigour of assessment, although this has not yet been implemented by all teachers. Most students feel well supported and achieve appropriately.
Design and technology	Good. Standards are well above the national average overall. Very good teaching, relationships and individual support for students creates an effective learning ethos.
Business studies	Very good. Standards recorded at A-level in 2001 were a significant improvement on those recorded in 2000. Current standards of work are in line with expectations in Year 12, but above average in Year 13. The quality of teaching is good and the department is led and managed very well.
Physical education	Good. Students achieve well and A-level results are above average. Teaching and learning are good and students have positive attitudes to their work.
Leisure and recreation	Very Good. Standards have been consistently high. Students have very positive attitudes. They learn very well in response to very good teaching.
Art and design	Unsatisfactory. Few students choose to take art and design to an advanced level. The teaching does not inspire and motivate students nor develop the levels of intellectual challenge required in advanced level courses. Students manage their own learning well and have good independent learning skills. The accommodation and resources are inadequate. Management is unsatisfactory.
Geography	Good. Standards are improving. Teaching is good. Teachers' enthusiasm leads students to develop their research skills and understanding of geographical processes and patterns. Students are now achieving well.
History	Just satisfactory. Standards are showing improvement. The quality of teaching is satisfactory. Students' positive attitudes enable them to learn effectively and their achievement is now satisfactory.
Sociology	Good. Students are achieving well. The quality of teaching and leadership and management are good. Students learn well and organise their work effectively.
Psychology	Good. Standards are above average at A-level. Good quality teaching enables students to progress well. Students have very good attitudes and a high level of commitment to their work.
Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment

English	Very good. Current standards are well above national expectations. The quality of teaching is very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and establish excellent working relationship with students who achieve well.
German	Satisfactory. Standards are similar to national expectations, although few students attain the highest grades. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Relationships are good.

Work was sampled in all other subjects. The quality of teaching in these was never less than satisfactory and in a significant proportion of lessons was good or better. Students' achievements are satisfactory overall. Students' attitudes and commitment to their studies have a positive impact on the standards they attain.

The provision for religious education for all sixth form students is unsatisfactory. There is no coherent planned provision for students as recommended by the local Agreed Syllabus and the school does not meet statutory requirements.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students are given good advice about their choice of courses. The induction programme for students joining the sixth form is good. The minority of girls are well supported and feel at ease in the sixth form. Tutors know their students well and provide on-going support. Students have opportunities to visit higher education establishments and careers conventions. Assessment data is used well to support students' learning. Students value the advice and support they get from their subject teachers. Opportunities are provided for students to experience the world of work through the work experience programme.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Management of the sixth form is good and provides an effective steer towards ensuring that standards are high and students fulfil their academic potential and aspirations. There is a shared commitment amongst the staff, governors and parents to provide high quality post-16 education that prepares students well for the next stage of their education.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The choice of courses suits their talents and career aspirations. • They are well taught and challenged to do their best in all or almost all of their subjects or courses. • They are helped and encouraged to study independently. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about their progress and advice about future options. • Support and help provided if they have a personal problem. • The range of activities and enrichment courses outside of lessons. • Treatment of sixth form students as responsible young adults, together with the response of the school to their views.
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The inspection team agrees with students' positive views, but does not uphold some of their more negative opinions. Inspectors found the range of activities outside of lessons to be very good and the quality of support, information, advice and guidance to be good. Information about students' progress was found to be good overall. In discussion, students felt they had made the right choice in joining the sixth form and that they were getting a good education. Aspects of the sixth form they particularly value are the support from the teachers for their academic studies and the close-knit community of the school. This included students new to the school. The negative responses were in the main due to the arrangement for independent study periods. Inspectors agree that current arrangements limit opportunities for students to use resources such as computers in their work during these sessions.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

Inspectors make judgements about provision in subjects and courses, and about leadership and management, in the range: excellent; very good; good; satisfactory; unsatisfactory; poor; very poor. Excellent and very good are equivalent to the judgement "outstanding" in further education and sixth form college reports; poor and very poor are equivalent to "very weak".

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and pupils' achievements

1. In this report, the term “standards” refers to students’ attainment relative to some clear benchmark, such as National Curriculum levels at the end of Year 9 or Year 11. “Above average standards”, for example, means that a higher proportion of students of a particular age are succeeding at or beyond the level set than is the case in the majority of schools. “Achievement” means how well students are doing now in relation to their prior attainment, which is what they could do when they started Year 7 or Year 10. Where reference is made to higher-average- and lower- attaining students this should be seen in the context of a school with selective entry.
2. GCSE results have shown improvement over the past five years. In 2001, results achieved by all students were in the highest five per cent at GCSE compared with schools nationally. The results indicate that students’ achievements are good overall. The trend of improvement in GCSE grades is above the national rate. Over the last two years, results have been very high in comparison with the national average. The results for individual subjects varied. Comparing students’ results in each subject shows that they did relatively well in English language and literature, mathematics, business studies, French, geography and history. They did less well in chemistry, design and technology and sports studies. The school achieved almost all the targets for GCSE results in 2001, which had been agreed with the local education authority and has set suitably challenging targets for 2002.
3. Where comparisons are made in this report with similar schools, these refer to the small number of selective schools in the country. Medway selection procedures admit around 30 per cent of each age cohort to its grammar schools, a much broader ability band than in other areas. Similar school measures are therefore of limited value. These comparisons in 2001 show that results overall at Chatham Boys’ were average. The proportion of students attaining five or more A*-C grades was well below average. The proportion gaining five or more or one or more A*-G grades was very high.
4. Standards of work of students in Year 11, as observed in lessons during the inspection and through students’ written work, were broadly similar to the results in 2001. Students’ attainment is well above average or better in most subjects and their achievements are good overall. This is because teachers have good subject knowledge and students have very positive attitudes towards their studies, want to do well and make the best use of the teaching they receive. Students in Years 10 and 11 do not attain the standards required by the local Agreed Syllabus for religious education because the amount of curriculum time allocated to the subject is insufficient. Their achievement in this subject is unsatisfactory.
5. Overall, the school’s results in the national assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were very high and results have been consistent over four years. The 2001 results in English, mathematics and science were very high. Compared with similar schools, results at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well below average.
6. Overall, when students enter the school, their levels of attainment are well above average in the core subjects of English, mathematics and science. Current standards reflect the 2001 results. Standards in almost all other subjects, as observed in lessons and through recorded work, are above average and students’ achievements overall are satisfactory in relation to their starting points. In art and design, students do not achieve as well as they should because too much of their work does not show progressively improving standards or reflect the standards students’ achieve in their other

subjects.

7. In ICT, current standards are above the national average. Overall achievement is good when compared to the average levels students attain when they join the school in Year 7. The contribution of other subjects to students' ICT skills is satisfactory and meets National Curriculum requirements. In 2001, the GCSE short course results in the information technology component of the combined design and technology and information technology course were broadly in line with the national average. The results were lower than might be expected because students did not have enough curriculum time to complete all aspects of the course in sufficient depth.

8. Standards of literacy are well above national expectations and are sufficient to support learning in all subjects. General strengths across subject areas are the emphasis most departments place on individual research and an understanding of subject specific vocabulary. Provision for the support of literacy is satisfactory. Following whole-school in-service training, most departments are developing a range of strategies. The co-ordination of a whole-school literacy strategy is at an early stage of development and appropriate support in all subject areas has yet to be achieved.

9. Students' standards of numeracy are good. Students acquire and extend their numeracy skills in their mathematics lessons but they have few planned opportunities to use their skills in other subjects across the curriculum. In science, students have good opportunities to use their numeracy skills, for example, when working out chemical equations or finding the line of best fit. They use graphs and charts in design and technology and databases in ICT. Currently no whole-school strategy is in place for promoting numeracy across the curriculum. There are plans to deal with this, starting with a whole-school training day.

10. The designated special educational needs co-ordinator has systems in place to advise subject staff of students' needs, and students with special education needs make good progress overall in relation to their prior attainment.

11. The students whose first language is not English make good progress. Gifted and talented students are making satisfactory progress overall. In some subjects, the tasks they are set are not sufficiently challenging which reduces the extent to which they can achieve their potential.

Sixth form

12. When account is taken of all students embarking on sixth form courses from Chatham Boys' and other local schools, prior attainment covers a broader range than the main school and is above average overall. Overall, standards are above average and most results are in line with predictions based on GCSE results. Almost all students who start in Year 12 complete two years in the sixth form. Almost all students who want to continue into higher education achieve qualifications which enable them to do so. In the subjects just sampled, students' achievements are satisfactory or good and their current standard of work is in line with or above national expectations for these courses. In some subjects, such as economics, students attain good standards due to effective teaching. Students' communication, numeracy and ICT skills are supported well through key skills lessons and all students follow a general studies course. The provision for religious education for all sixth form students is unsatisfactory. There is no coherent planned provision for students as recommended by the local Agreed Syllabus and the school does not meet statutory requirements. The students whose first language is not English make good progress.

13. In almost all of the subjects inspected in detail, evidence from current work and lessons observed indicates that standards range from average to well above average. This is a significant improvement

upon the situation reported six years ago when standards in almost all subjects were below average. Overall, students are achieving satisfactorily in relation to their various starting points. However, in art and design, students in Year 13 are making insufficient progress. Current work indicates that students do not demonstrate sufficiently high levels of intellectual curiosity, investigation and experimentation and their achievement since taking the AS-level examination has been unsatisfactory.

Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development

14. Students' attitudes to learning are excellent and they behave very well throughout the school day. Almost all parents who responded to the pre-inspection questionnaire indicated that their children enjoy coming to school and this is evident in lessons.

15. Students have a thirst for learning and they want to do well in their examinations. This is apparent for all ages. In their lessons, students work diligently and readily apply themselves to the task they have been set. Even when the teaching is mundane their attitudes ensure they make progress. Their enthusiasm for school extends to the many extra-curricular activities the school offers and students actively take part in sports teams as well as the Christian Union and war games. Attendance is very good and unauthorised absence is virtually nil.

16. The very good behaviour of the students is a credit to themselves and the school. They move around school sensibly and behave appropriately in different situations. In an assembly, they listened with rapt attention to a boy's excellent guitar playing, while in games lessons they show a high degree of sportsmanship. Students with special educational needs respond well to their provision. As observed in lessons, they work within the classroom to achieve the lesson objectives and reach standards comparable with their peers. All students spoken to say that bullying is not a problem in the school and that if any incident did occur teachers would deal with it swiftly. There was no apparent oppressive behaviour; to the contrary the youngest students spoke warmly of the help they received from older students. There have been no permanent exclusions during the past year and the number of fixed period exclusions is low.

17. Relationships are very good. Students work well together in lessons and sports teams. They show a great deal of consideration for each other's feelings. They are keen to nominate each other for "Man of the Match", listen attentively to each other during discussions, and show respect for each other's views. Students respect their teachers and feel that the teachers work hard for them and this contributes to their high degree of motivation.

18. Students' personal development is very good. By the time they leave the school, they are responsible young adults. Those students that have school responsibilities take them very seriously and they are proud of the positions they hold. Those that have half colours look forward to receiving the full colours in the sixth form. Students take responsibility for their learning and usually put a lot of effort into their homework. They gain an increasing understanding of different cultures, especially European ones. Students from different ethnic minorities in the school are fully included into the school and the degree of racial harmony is commendable. Students are able to understand moral and ethical issues in a range of subjects. For example, younger students tackled moral issues in music through lyric writing. Spiritual development is also good with students appreciating beautiful music and showing respect during prayers.

Sixth form

19. The attitudes and behaviour of students in the sixth form mirrors those of the main school. They

are very committed to doing the best they can in the subjects they choose to study. Consequently, their attendance is very good and they work very well in their lessons. The commitment they show during private study makes a significant contribution to their achievement. This enthusiasm does not extend to general studies and key skills. Students feel they should not have to study these subjects, as they would prefer to spend more time on their chosen subjects. In particular, they resent the fact that some universities do not take the points gained from general studies examination results into account when they offer places. They also find the workload for key skills too great.

20. The prefects show very responsible attitudes to their duties and younger students feel they can talk to them if they have a problem. They set a very good example to the younger students and help the school to function as an orderly community.

HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?

21. The quality of teaching has improved since the time of the last inspection with a significantly higher proportion of satisfactory and good teaching. This is having a positive impact on the standards attained. The percentage of satisfactory or better teaching has increased from 88 to 95 per cent. The number of lessons observed in which the teaching was judged to be good or better has also increased from 50 per cent to 63 per cent, and the percentage of very good or better lessons is similar at 12 per cent. The teaching observed was most effective in Years 8 and 10. Teaching was satisfactory or good in almost all subjects. Overall, teaching is satisfactory throughout the school. It was good in English and satisfactory in mathematics and science. However, there are weaknesses in the teaching of art and design in Years 7 to 9.

22. The lessons in which teaching was good or better were characterised by effective planning which enabled students to build consistently on previous learning. For example, in well-planned Year 9 English lessons students were able to form a general understanding of the play 'Macbeth'. Teachers enabled them to gain insights into the characters, their motives and emotions through a close exploration of the text. Much of the teaching is oral with students' thinking constantly challenged. Teachers choose imaginative approaches to consolidate discussion work and establish an appropriate balance of activities in lessons to increase students' motivation and enjoyment. For example, following the study of the implicit meanings and the imagery of the text, students examined the changing state of Macbeth's mind from the point of view of a psychiatrist and for homework wrote contemporary versions of the 'dagger' soliloquy.

23. Teachers' subject knowledge is a strength in mathematics and science and this has a positive impact on the quality of learning. It enables teachers to give clear explanations. In some mathematics lessons, where the learning objectives are made clear, students know exactly what they will be covering and this helps them to focus on the tasks and to learn effectively. Most lessons build suitably on students' previous learning experiences and this aids progression in learning. Where teaching has strengths in science, work in practical sessions is well-planned and organised. Gifted and talented students are suitably challenged through open ended investigation, the use of ICT and other information processing, especially in homework in Years 7 to 9 and coursework in Years 10 and 11.

24. Other strengths were seen in the teaching and learning in many lessons. Teachers communicated their interest and enthusiasm for topics well and this motivated students to learn. In geography, all teachers pass on to the students a strong 'love' for the subject. Timed tasks give students unambiguous targets and teachers use penetrating questions to extend students' understanding of geographical processes. In a Year 10 religious education class of higher-attaining students, the teacher's confidence and enthusiasm developed effectively students' knowledge and understanding of

the moral issues involved in decisions about abortion. In physical education, teachers have high expectations, concentrate on raising standards and yet are caring. In one Year 7 lesson, in poor weather conditions, a teacher was quick to notice a student who had decided to stand alone in goal. The student was rapidly included with the rest of the group so that he would not remain isolated and become colder. Classes are well organised and managed. For example, in the best music lessons, hard work and fun are closely linked. Very good relationships enable students to contribute suggestions about their own work and that of their peers. Teachers make sure that all students are included in the lesson so that they are able to experience success and celebrate their own achievements. Practical sessions are well organised and planned. In ICT, teachers effectively demonstrate new procedures and provide clear written guidance to support students' individual learning. Teachers use a variety of activities and resources in lessons. The very best modern foreign language lessons are taught with skill, enthusiasm and humour and consist of a variety tasks and activities. Good use is made of overhead and data projectors, cassette and video recorders and computers. Homework is set regularly and students put considerable effort into its completion. Staff show considerable commitment and run many homework clubs and support clinics. These have a positive effect on improving students' performance in their examinations.

25. The teaching of basic skills is satisfactory. Most teachers place appropriate emphasis on developing individual research skills together with an understanding of subject specific vocabulary. The library has an inadequate range of texts to fully support students' learning and is not being used extensively to promote students' wider reading. However, students use a range of other sources, including the Internet, to help with their studies. Numeracy skills are satisfactorily taught in mathematics lessons. Teachers plan opportunities for students to apply these skills in subjects such as science, design and technology and ICT. However, there are few planned opportunities in other subjects for students to extend their skills. Sufficient opportunities are provided for students to apply their ICT skills across the curriculum, although this varied between subjects. In most subjects, work is marked effectively. This gives students an indication of how well they are doing and how they can improve their work. However, marking in some subjects, such as art and design and physical education, is less effective as students generally have insufficient information about their National Curriculum levels and what they need to do to improve.

26. Where teaching had weaknesses or was unsatisfactory or poor, lessons were not planned to meet the needs of all students, particularly the highest-attainers. For example in less effective English lessons, higher-attaining students are 'coasting', well able to cope with the level of work provided whilst in other instances only the higher-attaining students are able to meet the learning goals set. In some mathematics lesson, teaching methods are not varied enough and only students' positive attitudes ensure their motivation to succeed. In history, some lessons are dominated by the teacher talking or closing down questions. Students are given few opportunities to work with independence and they are not challenged or inspired to put intellectual effort into oral or written tasks. In some lessons with weaknesses, students' very good attitudes and willingness to learn enables them to make progress. Because they are keen to learn, they compensate for less well-planned activities by using available resources such as textbooks. In art and design, the quality of teaching and learning is unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9. Some of the teaching observed during the week of the inspection was good and some was sound. However, art and design teaching fails to develop skills progressively, and raise knowledge and understanding to a high enough level over the longer term. Some lessons are not challenging enough and there is loss of motivation that leads some students to underachieve.

27. Over the last year the school has experienced difficulties in recruiting staff for some subject areas. This, coupled with the fact that a number of staff have suffered long-term illnesses, has had a negative impact on students' learning and standards in some subjects such as music and design and technology. The school has made considerable efforts to recruit suitably qualified staff and has managed the

situation effectively. Staffing shortages remain in design and technology, although a new member of staff has been appointed for next September.

28. The quality of teaching and learning for students with special educational needs is good and has improved since the last inspection. Teaching throughout the school is now enhanced by the learning support assistants who provide unobtrusive and effective support for their students in class. They take opportunities to liaise with the class teacher in preparing for lessons. In many lessons observed, teachers had responded to the students' individual education plans and thereby encouraged their learning in the lesson. Occasionally, teachers missed opportunities to act on the specific information they had been given and the students made less progress as a result.

29. No students are at an early stage of learning English. The students who speak English as a second language make similar progress to other students in lessons.

Sixth form

30. Overall teaching and learning in the sixth form are good and have many of the positive features reported in Years 7 to 11. Teaching in the sixth form has improved, and this has been a significant factor in the better examination results achieved since the last inspection. Of the lessons observed, 97 per cent were satisfactory or better, two-thirds were good or better and just over a fifth were very good or excellent. In the good, very good or excellent lessons the work is well matched to students' capabilities and this leads to students learning effectively. Scrutiny of students' work indicated that teaching was good over time. Teaching in almost all subjects was at least satisfactory and in a number, including English, design and technology, business studies and leisure and recreation, it was good or very good.

31. The best lessons have a number of similar features. These include teachers' good subject knowledge, high expectations and ability to motivate students. Teachers plan their lessons well to provide challenges and ensure that there is opportunity for discussion. For example, in a good Year 12 business studies lesson on production techniques, students had to analyse a set of data that offered some conflicting messages on the success of a firm's policies. All students worked well. The lesson made a very good contribution to developing key skills, involving literacy, numeracy and presentational skills. The students worked well in small groups and they evaluated their work well making references to various business concepts such as 'just-in-time'. Learning in this lesson was very good. Students also receive encouragement and good levels of individual support, for example, in design and technology. Lessons include a variety of teaching methods and teachers question effectively to check students' understanding and recall of information. They link work to familiar situations. For example in physical education, familiar sports and skills were used to help students' understanding the various uses of muscle fibres to achieve stamina in long distance events and explosive energy in short distance events.

32. Teachers provide a good balance of structure for students' learning whilst fostering independence. For example, in a Year 13 leisure and recreation lesson reviewing a land yachting trip, objectives were made very clear and students were given an organisational framework within which they could share experiences and consolidate the knowledge and understanding derived from the practical session. Relationships between students and teachers are a notable strength. Teachers work hard to build up an inclusive culture in groups to enable male and female students to take an equal part in discussion and activities. Teachers use the available time effectively, for example in psychology. A range of learning resources is used in lessons to support students' learning. However, students commented that they found the current arrangements for independent study periods limited their opportunity to use resources such as computers.

33. The teaching of key skills is well-planned and organised. Tasks are carefully structured and explained well. Homework is regularly set and marked. Marking and assessment of assignments is at least satisfactory in most subjects and of high quality in some, such as leisure and recreation. Assessments take place regularly and students are provided with information that enables them to gain a clear view about how they are progressing. However, in some subjects, such as history, students' work is not reviewed regularly enough to meet the needs of those students who struggle to organise their own learning. In English, the quality of marking is variable. Although comments are generally constructive, marking is often more detailed for higher-attaining students whilst lower-attaining students require more guidance.

34. In art and design, some of the teaching seen during the inspection was sound but the impact of teaching over the longer term is unsatisfactory. The work planned is not sufficiently challenging and expectations of both the standard and the amount of work are not high enough. Lessons were not well structured. The pace was too slow and insufficient time was given at the end of the lesson to review the learning in relation to past and future work. In psychology on occasions, some higher-attaining students are given answers that, with further probing questions, could have been elicited from them. In German lessons there is too much use of English at times, which undermines the importance of German as the every day means of communication.

35. In some lessons where teaching is weaker teaching relies on the teacher as the source of authority, and learning consists of passive listening. On some occasions, for example in history, good student questions were not acknowledged as interesting nor presented to the group, leading to original thinkers regarding their ideas as unimportant or wrong.

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

36. The quality of the school's curriculum is good in providing a suitable range of learning opportunities for all students in Years 7 to 11. The curriculum includes all subjects of the National Curriculum, together with religious education. Provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE), including sex education and attention to drugs misuse, is satisfactory. There are examples of good curricular provision in science, music and modern foreign languages. All students do two modern foreign languages in Years 7 to 11 and more able linguists have the opportunity to start Spanish in Year 9. In music, there is a good focus on practical activities in many lessons. In science, a new published course has been introduced in Years 7 to 9, which is having a positive impact on standards. In Years 10 and 11 biology, chemistry and physics are taught separately and the syllabuses are well organised. The curriculum time allocated by the school for the GCSE short course in ICT, in Years 10 and 11, is less than the average time allocated in other schools nationally. This means that students cannot complete all elements of the course in sufficient depth to gain the higher grades. National Curriculum requirements are now met for art and design and music. However, in Years 10 and 11, the provision for religious education remains unsatisfactory and does not meet the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus. A wide range of extra-curricular provision greatly enriches and complements the mainstream curriculum. Over 30 different clubs and sporting activities are well attended. Additionally, many homework clubs and support clinics are run and these have a positive effect on improving students' performance in their examinations. The art department organises visits to art galleries and the modern languages department organises visits and exchanges to France and Germany. Some students also help run the Linguafun primary French theatre presentation. Debates are organised by the English department together with theatre visits and the production of plays. In geography there are study visits to France and Italy. Both the science and ICT departments run after school clubs. Physical education

involves a very impressive range of sporting activities and several trips, including skiing.

37. The 26.25 hours of teaching time allocated is above the recommended minimum. This has enabled the school to meet the requirements of its Language College status to offer adequate time for all students to take two modern foreign languages. The school has developed a literacy policy that has been fully implemented. There is currently no whole-school strategy for promoting numeracy across the curriculum. There are plans to address this starting with a whole-school training day.

38. The school successfully ensures that students have equal opportunities and access to the curriculum. There has been significant improvement in the provision for students with special educational needs. All students with special educational needs benefit from the opportunities afforded their fellow students. Their provision comes through support in lessons, by learning support assistants and is targeted on the core subjects in the early years to ensure students have a secure footing in their secondary career. Students who may be gifted and talented are appropriately identified. In some lessons seen, more challenging demands were made of them to stretch their achievement. However, development is at an early stage in most curriculum areas.

39. Provision for careers education and guidance is satisfactory. Careers education is well-organised, beginning in Year 8 and taught within the PSHE programme throughout Years 9 to 11. The programme provides a satisfactory base for beginning the decision-making process. Although the local careers service continues to provide an excellent service, there has been a reduction in individual consultancy provision in school. The school has a very good careers library and computer-based research facility. A strength of careers guidance in the school is the programme of arranged visits. For example, students interested in engineering visit Chatham Dockyard. Students visit careers conventions in local schools and this year the school will host a languages convention under the sponsorship of Medway Education Business Partnership. There is a range of visitors to the school, for example display teams from the Armed Forces.

40. The school has established very good links with the local and other feeder primary schools. Two open days for prospective students are followed up by visits from members of the Chatham staff to each student once they have been accepted for September entry to the school. A two-day induction course in July has proved very successful in ensuring a smooth transition to secondary school. A range of activities contributes further to these strong links. These include offering accommodation for primary sporting activities, departments such as science and design and technology inviting students in to sample lessons, sixth form students supporting learning activities in local primary schools on a weekly basis, and the close links established through the Language College. A trip to Paris in 2001 consequently included a large number of Year 6 pupils from a local primary school.

41. The school is committed to its high profile in the community. The involvement of its students has a strong impact on their learning and development. Chatham is host to the Holcombe Arts Festival during which primary schools take part in activities such as drama and poetry productions. The Language College has a major commitment to the community. The performances they present to primary students benefit from the contributions of the school's student teachers as well as their students. Master classes are also offered to primary students together with support for primary teachers in language methodology, and classes for adults in the community. Links with the local industry and business community offers students productive work experience placements. The school's considerable range of sporting and outdoor activities cements its place in the local community. Many of these are supported in different ways by the local community, for example with transport for the students. Many developments have taken place since the last inspection and overall improvement to the curriculum has been good. Provision for religious education remains a weakness

42. The school places a high value on students' personal development and is very successful. It has improved its provision since the last inspection.

43. Provision for students' moral and social development is very good. Many teachers provide opportunities to discuss moral issues that are pertinent to the subjects the students are studying. For example in English, students discussed the attitudes and values of the First World War poets. The strongest support for these aspects is the school's ethos. There is a strong moral code that students understand and respect. Students are expected to help each other and they respond to this well. The prefect system and form captains are effective in developing students' responsibility in the school community. The school council also provides an arena for students to develop the skills of citizenship. In lessons, teachers plan for students to work in a variety of groupings and this develops their social skills of co-operation and considering the views and needs of others.

44. Since the last inspection, the school has improved its provision for spiritual development. There is now a "thought for the day" broadcast over the tannoy system in addition to assemblies. In assemblies, students have the opportunity to reflect on issues – although time can sometimes be rather short. Students' spiritual development is also promoted in some lessons. For example, a Year 11 student's musical composition inspired by the Holocaust was very moving. The support teachers give to students helps them develop their self-esteem and raise their aspirations. Overall, provision for students' spiritual development is now good.

45. Cultural provision is good. The status of Language College gives a higher priority to European cultures through the modern languages department. The many extra-curricular clubs also make a significant contribution, including drama and music. During activities week, students have the opportunity to travel to Italy to study volcanoes, while others study Shakespeare. A range of opportunities for students to study non-European cultures is in place, for example in music students study music from different parts of the world. Cultural exchange visits to South Africa are arranged and good use is made of links with Japan to enhance the curriculum. Although in history, the examination of multicultural issues is not sufficiently planned for.

Sixth form

46. The overall quality and range of learning opportunities are good with examples of good curricular provision in subjects such as English, design and technology, and key skills. The curriculum in psychology is well structured and supported by a good scheme of work. Excellent opportunities are provided in the AS-level physics course for course work based round medical physics. The AVCE leisure and recreation course is well structured and linked to specific projects and visits. Students have good opportunities to link with the community through the inclusive, participative teaching approach. In religious education, however, the provision does not meet the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus and remains unsatisfactory. A wide range of extra-curricular provision greatly enriches and complements the mainstream curriculum, for example skiing trips in physical education and visits and exchanges to France and Germany. A website club is organised by the ICT department and design and technology also runs after school activities. Field trips and visits are run by the history and geography departments. In science, the extra-curricular industry link is very good. All students take a key skills course, which is well-planned to include ICT, communications and number. However, some students said that they found the workload considerable. Attendance at some of the business language lessons was low.

47. An activities session is provided during curriculum time for all sixth form students. Every student is expected to take part. A wide variety of activities is offered. Some choose to help in primary schools. In music, students prepare a concert performance, in drama they do role-plays and in sport

opportunities exist, both on and off site, to take part in diverse activities such as aerobics, team sports and trampolining. Highly qualified coaches assist teachers with the programme which is well organised.

48. The school has a very good careers library and computer-based research facility. The work experience programme for Year 12 students is good and students receive appropriate advice for moving to higher education. A strength of careers guidance in the school is the programme of arranged visits. Students from the sixth form also participated in the 'Young Enterprise' competition, reaching the national finals.

49. The Chatham Sixth Form Consortium is in its early days. It has a blocked timetable which allows for movement between partner schools, and a wide choice of subjects and courses. Chatham Grammar's many links with higher education institutions, such as Canterbury and Greenwich, enable its students to benefit from a wide range of professional guidance when considering their next destination after their post-16 education.

50. The general studies course makes a good contribution to students' personal development as the units cover moral and social issues such as anorexia. Students also have the opportunity to reflect upon the quality of life and explore different cultures. The course promotes good citizenship through investigating how society changes and by studying politics and economics. Some students expressed the view that the general studies course should be optional. In addition, the many responsibilities the school provides for students, for example school captain and sports captains, contribute very well to their personal development. However, the insistence that all study periods should be supervised limits students' ability to develop the independent study skills they will need if they go on to higher education. As part of their work experience students have the opportunity to work in France and this is a very good contribution to their social and cultural development. The sixth form curriculum has been improved in many ways since the last inspection. Overall, improvement is good.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?

51. The school cares well for its students, as was the case six years ago.

52. The support and guidance for students' personal development is very good. Students and parents value the caring ethos of the school and the pastoral support teachers provide. Form tutors know their students very well and are very committed to helping them do well. They and the heads of year take a close interest in their students' personal development. They monitor effort and attainment grades as well as record of achievement diaries. For those students who are causing concern there is the formal system using the green, yellow and red reports. The importance the school places on pastoral care is evident in the role of the welfare tutor. She provides a listening ear for students who have problems and is involved in supporting those students who have personal problems. She liaises closely with outside support agencies and parents as appropriate.

53. Very good procedures are in place to monitor both attendance and behaviour. These are very effective and result in the very good behaviour and attendance of the students. Students value the rewards they receive for both academic achievement and effort. Year 10 students miss the reward system that operates in the lower school and would like one introduced for the middle school. Students do not feel bullying is an issue at this school but if an incident did occur, they feel that the victim or his friend would be able to talk to a member of staff who would quickly deal with it.

54. Child protection procedures are satisfactory and are known to members of staff. New members of

staff are advised of these as part of the induction programme. For established staff, there are occasional refresher training sessions. Arrangements for health and safety are good. The governors receive reports from the headteacher and health and safety committee on relevant issues. Individual departments carry out risk assessments.

55. As required, the special educational needs co-ordinator has a comprehensive record of students identified as in need and on the register. Provision has improved since the time of the last inspection. Students' progress is regularly monitored and reviews fully meet requirements. Information on students with special educational needs is made available to all teachers along with their individual education programme targets where appropriate. Subject teachers are expected to build on these to make the provision for students with special educational needs effective.

56. Overall, procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are good, an improvement since the previous report. Different assessment systems have been used in the recent past. The system now in place is robust and is facilitating the setting of student targets and the tracking of their progress towards them. A central computer database contains an extensive range of data including standardised test scores and end of key stage test data. To this is being added the results of assessments carried out twice a year. This data is used to set a target for each student, which is related to National Curriculum levels or GCSE grades. Standardising of levels and grades, including those for effort, is underdeveloped. In some subjects such as music and physical education, National Curriculum teacher assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 have been over-generous. Information on each student is shared with their parents through the full annual report, an interim report and discussion at a parents' evening. Students compile their National Record of Achievement to demonstrate their progress while at the school. Examination results are analysed and meetings with subject managers take place to discuss the outcomes.

57. The use of assessment information to guide curriculum planning is satisfactory. The centrally-held data is available to teachers to inform their curriculum planning but not all are using it effectively. Assessment data is used in the allocation of students to sets.

58. Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are good. Monitoring is carried out by heads of department, subject teachers, tutors and heads of year. There is provision for the mentoring of students by the heads of year and senior managers. All departments set tests at the end of each unit or module of work. However, the effectiveness of assessment practice varies between departments. For example, in science the monitoring of students' academic progress is good because of the good departmental tracking system. Whilst in art and design assessment practice is unsatisfactory; assessments are not used to track student progress or to inform curriculum planning and students do not know the level of the National Curriculum at which they are working.

Sixth form

Assessment

59. There are good procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress. The school subscribes to a project which suggests predicted examination grades. Students' attainment is assessed at regular intervals in terms of grades. Assessment practice varies between departments. For example, it is very good in leisure and recreation where assessments are well linked to the schemes of work. Students know their predicted grades and are fully aware of assessment criteria and the extent to which they have met them. However, assessment practice is unsatisfactory in art and design where teachers' planning does not take sufficient account of students' predicted grades. The use of assessment information to guide curriculum planning is satisfactory overall and good sometimes, for example in

psychology.

60. Procedures for monitoring and supporting students' academic progress are good and are contributing to their achievement. Progress reviews provide an opportunity to consider a student's current level of achievement, and for the subject teacher and student to set a target grade together, along with three targets for action which will enable that grade to be achieved. Parents are kept informed of student progress. Communication with parents is through progress reports and the annual report. Annual reports give strengths and targets for action but these are not always sufficiently precise. Parents are invited to set targets for their children and for the school. Teachers know their students well and students feel that they are well supported in their work.

Advice, support and guidance

61. The support and guidance given to students in the sixth form is good. Before they enter the sixth form, they receive good advice and information about the subjects on offer. Students that join the sixth form from different schools are well supported and quickly become part of the community. Students value the support they receive from their subject teachers.

62. Students have the opportunity to visit careers conventions and teachers take them to some university open days. In addition, all students have work experience in Year 12, with some students doing this in France. Advice and guidance on moving on to higher education or into employment at the end of the sixth form is satisfactory. Some students felt that whilst careers advice and information is available it is up to students to take full advantage of this.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?

63. The school has maintained a very effective partnership with parents.

64. Parents are very positive about the school and see no areas of the school with significant weaknesses. They feel they are well informed about their children's progress and that the school takes their views and concerns into account. Nearly all parents think their children make good progress and that this is due to good teaching. They value the leadership of the headteacher and the ways the school helps students mature into responsible young adults.

65. The school involves parents very closely in the education of their children. Questionnaires are sent out to gauge parents' views and these are then taken into account. A recent result of this has been the change in the timing of an options information evening for Year 9 parents. The record of achievement diaries keep parents informed of the homework their children should be doing. The strong support parents give to their children's learning at home makes a very good contribution to the students' achievement, particularly those with special educational needs. There is frequent communication with parents. The special educational needs co-ordinator, moving appropriately to the recommendations of the new Code of Practice, communicates with parents each term as the individual education plan targets for students are reviewed.

66. Parents provide very good support for a number of school activities. They drive the minibuses, help run extra-curricular clubs and go on school trips. The Holcombe Association is very active and raises considerable amounts of money. At present, this is going towards the purchase of a new minibus.

67. The information the school provides for parents is satisfactory overall. There is good information about the curriculum choice in Years 9 and 11. The prospectus and sixth form booklet give helpful

information about the school. In addition, the headteacher's newsletters help keep parents informed of events in school. Information about students' progress through the parent consultation evenings, annual and interim reports is satisfactory. However, there is little subject specific information in the reports about students' progress and the targets set tend to be rather vague.

Sixth form students' views

68. The responses to the sixth form students' questionnaires were mixed. When talking to students it became clear that they felt they had made the right choice in joining the sixth form and that they were getting a good education. Aspects of the sixth form they particularly value are the support from the teachers for their academic studies and the close-knit community of the school. This included students new to the school. The girls who join the school in the sixth form feel fully involved and enjoy being at the school.

69. Students' negative responses were in the main due to the arrangement for independent study periods and the support given to them in their applications for university places. Students do not like having to work in groups supervised by a teacher during their independent study periods. They feel that it limits their opportunity to use resources such as computers and shows a lack of trust in them by the teachers. Year 13 students feel let down by the school's lateness in submitting their university application forms even though they had completed them by early October. In addition, they do not like having to take general studies and find aspects of the key skills programme very time consuming. They feel that this detracts from the effort they can put into their chosen subjects.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

70. The headteacher is a good leader who has been instrumental in enabling standards in the main school and the sixth form to improve and the school to gain in popularity. The school has been hampered in the speed and thoroughness of its developments by difficulties in recruiting staff, some staff illness and some necessary reorganisation of management responsibilities. This has been skilfully managed by the headteacher. His leadership throughout these negotiations, whilst at the same time overseeing the bid for specialist school status, has been effective. The school has consequently made sound improvement since the last inspection and is now in a stronger position to continue to raise standards. Parents hold the headteacher in very high regard and there is considerable respect in the local community for what the students achieve.

71. The senior management team is very small given the size of the school. Overall, senior and middle managers, with responsibilities for subjects and students' personal development, carry out their roles well. Management of almost all subjects is at least sound and in a number it is good. There are however, some inefficiencies in handling paper-work and meeting deadlines where better organisational skills and more robust systems for storing and retrieving information would make the day-to-day management run more smoothly. In the main, delegated tasks are well handled. However, the impact and effectiveness of some bigger whole-school developments are lessened where those with responsibility for one aspect have a narrow, rather than a whole-school, perspective. Ensuring that there is a shared understanding and commitment to overarching principles is an area that the headteacher and senior managers are dealing with as part of their line-management roles. The co-ordinator for special educational needs has effective systems in place to support her students. There are appropriate links with outside agencies and the local authority. She has initiated a system of linked representatives from each curriculum area to share information and good practice, though this is yet to be fully developed.

72. Governors have a very good and accurate understanding of the challenges the school faces. They know the school, students and staff and share a very good understanding of what the school does well and where improvements are needed. The role of critical friend is taken very seriously and governors are not shy in asking challenging questions - of the headteacher, senior management team and middle managers. Some visit the school regularly and carry out formal and informal monitoring, for example of the up-keep of the buildings and site, the work of teachers and the behaviour and attitudes of the students. These visits together with the information governors receive on examination results, provide the basis for their in-put into the school development plan and decisions on spending priorities.

73. Governors fulfil their statutory responsibilities well. However, the statutory requirements, to fulfil the requirements for religious education in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form, are not fully met.

74. Monitoring and evaluation of performance is good overall. Performance targets have been set for all staff. A programme of lesson observations and interviews effectively ensures that training meets the needs of individual teachers and whole-school priorities. This has led to improvements in teaching and learning in many subject areas.

75. Good monitoring systems are in place to track students' personal development and their attendance. Use is made of data, provided by national and local government, enabling the senior management team and governors to compare the school's performance with similar schools. Sound systems operate within the school to track the progress of individual students across different subjects of the curriculum. The data collection, and subsequent analysis of results, is mainly but not exclusively, carried out by senior managers who measure the impact and added value the school has had on students' achievements in examinations. Occasionally the information has identified under-performance in certain subjects and triggered additional monitoring and support of teaching and learning. In most respects this has led to improved standards.

76. Management of students' academic progress is good. In their monitoring of performance, some subject leaders make better use of data and teacher assessments of students' achievements than others. Where it is used well, heads of department intervene at an early stage to address weaknesses and to carry out their own monitoring. However, the monitoring and tracking of performance is complicated by the inaccurate assessments and irregular use of National Curriculum levels in some subjects and monitoring is not rigorous enough in all subjects in Years 7 to 9 to be fully effective in improving standards.

77. The governors and the headteacher have been very effective in making plans and securing funding for some major improvements to the site. The plans for whole-school improvements are good and reflect an appropriate broad overview of the priorities similar to those identified in the inspection. There are parallel concerns, for example for improving achievement of higher-attaining students, aspects of monitoring and ensuring consistency in the quality of management across departments.

78. The quality of financial management and planning is good. Both the headteacher and the chair of governors have financial backgrounds which helps them to maintain very tight control of the finances. Senior managers and governors monitor the finances well and make informed decisions based on accurate budget information provided by the finance officer. They have been effective in improving the quality of accommodation and are continuing to plan imaginatively for further significant improvements. Spending is directly related to the school improvement plan and systems for monitoring expenditure are effective. The management of general funds and designated grants is satisfactory and expenditure against them is effectively recorded, showing clearly that designated grants are used properly for their specific purposes. The school makes effective use of a computerised management system which supports the management of the finances. Financial planning has been well managed.

The current large financial surplus has been accrued to help fund planned improvements to accommodation. Money is used wisely; the school has made good progress in implementing best value principles and applies these rigorously.

79. There has been significant change to the staff team of the school in the last two years. The governors and headteacher have maintained staffing to a high level during difficult circumstances and have made some very successful appointments. They are sensitive to the needs of staff and support them when they are ill. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is satisfactory. Subject teachers are appropriately qualified in their main teaching areas to teach the current curriculum. Two new music specialist teachers are already raising standards and interest in the subject. Learning support assistants have recently been appointed and are making a good contribution to the progress of students with special educational needs. The technicians within the ICT department provide very good support and are helping to raise standards. Despite strenuous efforts, the school has had difficulty in recruiting staff for some curriculum areas. At present the use of non-specialist teachers in the delivery of design and technology, in some classes, is having a negative impact on standards achieved by students in Years 7 to 11.

80. There are satisfactory arrangements for the induction and mentoring of newly qualified and newly appointed teachers. New staff are allocated a mentor to ensure induction is swift and effective. No specific handbook provides guidance for new teachers but there is useful information within the comprehensive staff handbook. Opportunities are provided for additional training but there is no established system for prioritising this.

81. The programme for staff development is satisfactory and is included within the school's performance management policy. Individual needs of teachers are matched to school development priorities. There is a comprehensive training programme for staff and all staff have received ICT training as part of the National Grid for Learning programme. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning have improved considerably since the previous inspection and observation of teachers' work in the classroom is now a feature of the school's programme of professional development.

82. Learning resources are satisfactory overall, with strengths in subjects such as ICT, science and design and technology. Most departments incorporate classroom resources well to support teaching and learning. Resources for ICT have improved significantly since the last inspection and the ratio of computers to students is well above average. The computer rooms are open to students at lunchtimes for independent study. Computers are well used and well looked after. The use of computers for departmental management is very good with each member of staff having access to a laptop computer. Resources for art and design are unsatisfactory. The recording equipment used in music lessons is of poor quality and does little to enhance students' performances. The management of the distribution of resources is effective. Funds are allocated to each department after an analysis of the routine annual requirements of all departments. Departments are then invited to bid for further funding for specific curriculum development projects.

83. The school library is unsatisfactory. It fails to provide a conducive and welcoming atmosphere for individual study. The space devoted to individual work is inadequate and does not encourage students to engage in wider reading. There has been little improvement in the library book stock since the last inspection. The range of non-fiction is quite dated and does not provide enough interesting materials to support the English curriculum. Many subject specific textbooks are located within departments but the overall number of books available to students in the library is well below the recommended number. There is a limited stock of CD-ROMs and a small number of computers with Internet access. During the lunch break, the library is well used by students of all ages for reading, doing homework and working on computers and the Internet. At other times, relatively few students use the library. A group

of hard-working student librarians volunteer their services regularly to help the full time librarian.

84. The school's accommodation has improved significantly since the last inspection as a result of very good planning and commitment from the headteacher and governors. The headteacher has been imaginative and frugal in using available funds. For example, he successfully obtained a large amount of good value office style furniture when a national department store closed down. However, due to the substantial increase in student numbers, accommodation still remains inadequate and depresses standards in some curriculum areas. In art and design, half the timetable is taught in non-specialist rooms with insufficient storage areas. This restricts the delivery of the curriculum and has a negative impact on standards. The lack of on-site facilities for physical education results in students having to undertake a ten-minute journey to access a good quality AstroTurf pitch. Old demountable classrooms which were reported to be nearing the end of their useful life at the time of the last inspection are used for teaching a number of subjects, and are inadequate. There are some leaking roofs in the language block. The senior management and the governors are aware of the deficiencies and the school has recently secured financial assistance from the local education authority for an extensive building programme to deal with some of the problems. The school has also undertaken a considerable amount of work in trying to obtain a local underused sports hall to improve facilities for students with planned use for other local schools as well as community access.

Sixth form

Leadership and management

85. Management of the sixth form is good. The head of the sixth form is also a member of the senior management team. He is able to provide a sixth form perspective at all meetings that gives a steer towards ensuring that standards are high and students' aspirations are met. The systems for monitoring students' academic progress and personal development are good. With a few exceptions, subject leaders make good use of performance data to track students progress and to help evaluate the effectiveness of their teaching and learning on examination performance.

86. There is a shared commitment amongst the staff, governors and parents to provide high quality post-16 education that prepares students well for the next stage of their education. Governors give support to the sixth form, monitoring standards and making regular visits. They are working closely with the headteacher to improve study facilities. However, governors have not ensured that the statutory requirement for religious education is met.

87. The school has recently formed a consortium with three other local schools. The development plan provides a very clear structure for improving post-16 entitlement both within the school and in the Medway region. The key management tasks are clearly identified along with the review dates, for line managers to meet, and for reports to be submitted to governors. Development planning for the school, including the sixth form, is good. Financial information indicates that the sixth form is operating successfully within the budget that has been provided for the purpose and best value principles are well applied. Improvement since the last inspection has been good.

Resources

88. Learning resources are generally sufficient. In science, they are good with many new resources including lap top computers and a video microscope. In design and technology there is a good range of

hand and machine tools. The resources for art and design are insufficient to meet all learning needs. The match of teachers to the needs of the sixth form curriculum is satisfactory and shares similar features to the main school. There are well qualified staff for the vast majority of post-16 courses.

89. Overall, the quality of accommodation within the sixth form is satisfactory. Most of the teaching is delivered in mainstream accommodation. However, the art department has no designated sixth form area for independent study or to display work. This restricts the scale of opportunities for creative work. There has been little improvement in the library book stock since the last inspection. Consequently, there is a surprisingly small stock of books with only 600 within the sixth form section.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

90. Building on the improvement made since the previous inspection, the headteacher, staff and governors should:

- (1) improve provision for art and design in Years 7 to 11 and for religious education in Years 10 and 11;
4, 6, 12-3, 21, 25-6, 34, 36, 46, 58-9, 73, 82, 86, 88-9, 136-146, 196-201
- (2) increase some teachers' expectations of the highest-attaining students together with the range of teaching methods used by some staff ;
11, 26, 34, 102, 109, 122, 132, 137, 143, 150, 161-2, 166, 199, 206, 213, 241, 250, 267
- (3) improve some areas of accommodation which do not provide satisfactory learning environments, for example for physical education, geography, history and art and design;
84, 138, 145, 156, 165, 185, 194-5, 231
- (4) improve library provision. The library is small and does not contain sufficient books of good quality to support students' wider reading and research.
25, 83, 89, 113, 124, 134, 145, 157, 165, 201

91. Sixth form

- (1) improve provision for art and design and religious education;
12-3, 34, 46, 73, 82, 86, 88-9, 238-242,

- (2) improve library provision. The library is small and does not contain sufficient books of good quality to support students' wider reading and research.
89, 215, 246, 253, 277, 281

(the numbers in italics show the main paragraphs in which these issues are discussed within the report)

92. The report also identifies some other issues which governors may wish to include in the action plan to be developed following the inspection. They include:

Numeracy across the curriculum – as planned	<i>9, 25, 37, 192</i>
Further development of ICT in some subjects	<i>112, 124, 169, 201</i>
The quality of marking and use of assessment data in some departments – as planned	<i>25, 33, 56, 58-9, 111, 143, 171, 179, 188, 253, 275</i>
Further improvement of aspects of the work of some middle Managers – as planned	<i>71, 76</i>
The amount of curriculum time allocated to the GCSE ICT short course	<i>7, 36, 167,</i>
Resources in some subjects	<i>82, 145, 183</i>
Improvement in the attitudes of some students, in Years 9 to 11, to studying two modern languages	<i>175</i>
The quality of reports – as planned	<i>60, 67</i>
Improvement in sixth form students' perceptions of the value of the key skills and general studies courses	<i>19, 46, 50, 69</i>
Greater opportunity for sixth form students to study independently – as planned	<i>32, 50, 69</i>

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	Years 7 – 11	147
	Sixth form	68
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		79

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Years 7 – 11							
Number	0	18	75	47	6	1	0
Percentage	0	12	51	32	4	1	0
Sixth form							
Number	3	11	31	21	2	0	0
Percentage	4	16	46	31	3	0	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for the sixth form as each lesson represents more than one percentage point.

Information about the school's pupils

Pupils on the school's roll	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	727	232
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	39	5

Special educational needs	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	1	0
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	43	3

English as an additional language	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	45

Pupil mobility in the last school year	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	15
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	23

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	5.1
National comparative data	8.1

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.0
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 (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2001	149	0

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	147	148	149
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	147	148	149
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (98)	99 (98)	100 (97)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	86 (90)	99 (94)	85 (85)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	148	148	148
	Girls	n/a	n/a	n/a
	Total	148	148	148
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	99 (100)	99 (100)	99 (100)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	97 (83)	99 (97)	93 (96)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

Attainment at the end of Key Stage 4 (Year 11)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	115	1	116

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	108	115	115
	Girls	1	1	1
	Total	109	116	116
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	94 (100)	100 (100)	100 (100)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	62.5 (62.3)
	National	39 (38.4)

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

Attainment at the end of the sixth form (Year 13)

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
	2001	87	14	101

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS / Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	87	14	101
	Average point score per candidate	18.3 (17.0)	20.9 (16.4)	18.7 (16.9)
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9 (16.8)	18.0 (17.7)	17.5 (17.3)

		For candidates entered for GCE A / AS examinations			For candidates entered for Advanced GNVQ / VCE examinations		
		Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	Number of candidates	87	14	101	4	3	7
	Average point score per candidate	17.7	17.9	17.7	13.5	14	13.7
National	Average point score per candidate	16.9	17.9	17.4	9.8	11.4	10.6

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

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	1
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	0
Indian	31
Pakistani	3
Bangladeshi	3
Chinese	7
White	900
Any other minority ethnic group	11

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	15	
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	62.15
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	15.4:1

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	10
Total aggregate hours worked per week	282

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	73.8
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11

Key Stage 3	25.5
Key Stage 4	19.4

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	18.6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	38
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2.1

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
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	£
Total income	2,459,528
Total expenditure	2,447,344
Expenditure per pupil	2,695
Balance brought forward from previous year	319,072
Balance carried forward to next year	331,256

Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.0
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	3.6

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	959
Number of questionnaires returned	429

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	50	48	1	0	0
My child is making good progress in school.	45	53	0	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	37	59	1	0	2
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	31	63	4	0	2
The teaching is good.	43	56	0	0	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	28	62	6	2	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	46	51	2	0	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	59	41	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	32	59	4	0	5
The school is well led and managed.	48	50	1	0	1
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	37	60	0	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	41	52	1	0	6

*numbers may not add to 100% due to rounding

Other issues raised by parents

In letters and at the meeting parents' and carers were very positive about the work of the school and the care that it provided for their children.

PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

ENGLISH

Overall, the quality of provision in English is **good**.

Strengths

- Students achieve high standards in tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations.
- The standard of students' speaking and listening skills.
- Students' behaviour and attitudes.
- The introduction of the National Literacy Strategy in Years 7 and 8.
- Leadership and management.

Areas for improvement

- Introducing a skills-based system of assessment.
- Implement plans to use drama and ICT to a greater extent to enhance students' learning in Years 7 to 9.

99. Although the attainment of Year 7 students entering the school is well above the national expectation, there is a broader range than in most grammar schools.

100. This is reflected in the end of Year 9 test results where in 2001, the percentage of students achieving the higher levels, 6 and 7 was very high compared with the national average but well below the average of similar schools. Overall performance in the tests was well above the national average, but below similar schools. Results have remained stable over the last four years. All students are making at least satisfactory progress.

101. Some additional support is provided for students with special educational needs. Students make good progress and most achieve standards commensurate with their capabilities. No students for whom English is an additional language require additional support. There is no specific provision for students on the gifted and talented register.

102. The proportion of students achieving A* to C grade passes in the 2001 GCSE English language and GCSE English literature examinations was well above the national average but slightly below that of selective schools. In English language, overall performance was well above the national average and a high percentage of students achieved A* and A grades. In English literature, the percentage of students achieving A* and A grades fell in 2001, but was still high compared with other subjects. Although all students are making at least satisfactory progress, higher-attaining students could do better.

103. By the end of Years 9 and 11, the quality of most students' speaking and listening skills is well above the national expectation. Students listen carefully to teachers and to each other and respond appropriately. By the end of Year 11, most students are confident, fluent speakers, able to organise their thoughts into cogent arguments. The focus on learning through discussion contributes significantly to students' learning. The school debating society provides many students with the opportunity to develop these skills further.

104. Students make good progress in the development of reading skills. Attainment is above the national expectation by the end of Year 9 with students reading fluently and confidently, but not always with sufficient understanding. For example, where emphasis is placed on the close analysis of text, there is a significant gap in the appreciation of language between the higher-attaining students and other students. However, by the end of Year 11, standards of reading comprehension and appreciation are well above national expectations for most students. Students read independently beyond their lessons, but at the moment insufficient monitoring of this reading takes place to ensure that all students read appropriately and experience a wide variety of fiction. The library does not have enough books to support students' wider reading.

105. Students' writing is above national expectations by the end of Year 9. Most students master the basic skills of writing during Years 7 and 8 and these are secure by the end of Year 9. Students learn to write in a wide range of forms and features of students' writing are a sense of style and an appropriate use of vocabulary. There are imaginative approaches to writing. For example, in Year 7, students prepared advertising material for Shakespeare's Globe Theatre and, in Year 10, students made pamphlets to explain Napoleon's rise to power in 'Animal Farm'; students wrote effective soliloquies based on their reading of Shakespeare's plays. However, standards are inconsistent between classes and reflect differences in the quality of teaching and the marking of students' work. An area for development is to determine where strengths and weaknesses lie for individuals and groups and to introduce further writing strategies for students of all abilities. By the end of Year 11, there is a significant gap between higher and average-attaining students, for example in structuring and sustaining extended writing. A general weakness is the quality of handwriting and presentation of written work. Presentation is much improved when students have word-processed their coursework. Taking into account students' GCSE results, the lessons observed and their recorded work, most are achieving well for their ability in Years 10 and 11.

106. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. The quality of teaching is mainly satisfactory in Years 7 to 9 with some good and very good teaching. Although there is a small proportion of unsatisfactory teaching in Years 10 and 11, most of the teaching is of a good standard with some very good teaching.

107. A feature of teaching is very good planning, not only of individual lessons but sequences of lessons so that students constantly build on previous learning. For example, from a general understanding of the play 'Macbeth', Year 9 students gained insights into the characters, their motives and emotions, through a close exploration of the text. Much of this is oral teaching with students' thinking constantly challenged. Teachers choose imaginative approaches to consolidate discussion work and establish an appropriate balance of activities in lessons to increase students' motivation and enjoyment. For example, following the study of the implicit meanings and imagery of the text, students examined the changing state of Macbeth's mind from the point of view of a psychiatrist and, for homework, wrote contemporary versions of the 'dagger' soliloquy.

108. Teachers ensure that they share learning objectives with students and discuss means of meeting them as the lesson proceeds. This empowers students and enables them to take some responsibility for their own learning. Teachers have a good command of their subject and have established very good relationships. This provides students with the confidence to explore ideas in safe learning environments. Students are keen to read their work, explore ideas and enjoy the collective power of learning.

109. Not all aspects of teaching are equally successful. The effectiveness of the above approaches to teaching and learning is limited when tasks set are not appropriate for the capabilities of all students in the class. In some lessons, higher-attaining students are 'coasting', well able to cope with the level of

work provided. In other instances only the higher-attaining students are able to meet the learning goals. For example, in a lesson focusing on persuasive writing techniques, students were asked to write in the style of Martin Luther King's 'I have a dream..' speech, only the higher-attaining students were able to match the style; most students required supportive strategies.

110. The quality of learning is further enhanced by students' positive attitudes. Students work very hard in lessons and homework is usually completed conscientiously. They enjoy the challenges set for them. They work well in groups and enter fully into class discussions. Behaviour is good.

111. The department regularly assesses students' written work and explains the level reached, but procedures have yet to be devised which systematically identify the key skills individuals or groups need to improve their work. As a consequence, most targets are too general to be meaningful.

112. The curriculum meets statutory requirements in Years 7 to 11 and for the most part provides equal opportunities for all students. The curriculum is broad and balanced and the new scheme of work takes account of the need to integrate drama and ICT within English teaching. The school has made significant progress in developing the National Literacy Strategy in Years 7 and 8. There is good provision for students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, for example, through sensitive poetry writing and thoughtful discursive writing. All year groups discuss these personal dimensions as a part of their literature studies. A good range of extra-curricular activities complements and extends the mainstream curriculum and enhances the personal dimensions of learning, including a debating society and a drama club. There are opportunities for students to visit the theatre and a school play is in rehearsal. The department organises additional examination study classes during holiday periods.

113. The management of the department is good; this is an improvement since the last report. The new head of faculty has made good progress in re-organising and developing the department. Much has been accomplished in a short time. Departmental planning is appropriate and reflects the aims of the school. The new scheme of work in Years 7 to 9 and some units of work in Years 10 and 11 are in place. These provide effective support for teachers and ensure continuous and progressive learning in the classroom. Although learning resources are generally adequate, there are too few poetry books for students in Years 7 to 9

114. There have been improvements in the overall quality of teaching and in managing change within the department. Much of this has yet to impact on standards. Improvement is satisfactory.

MATHEMATICS

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Students achieve high standards in tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations.
- Teachers' subject knowledge enables them to give clear explanations so that students learn.
- Students are well-motivated and willing to learn.

Areas for improvement

- A greater range of teaching styles to enable students to learn more effectively.
- Improvements to the schemes of work, including identified opportunities for using ICT to enhance students' learning in mathematics.

115. Students join the school with very high attainment in mathematics, although there is a broader

range of attainment than in most grammar schools.

116. In 2001, the results of the tests at the end of Year 9 were very high compared to schools nationally. They were below the average for similar schools. Students' performance in mathematics was broadly similar to that in English and science. Since the last inspection, results have shown an upward trend in line with the national trend. The proportion of students achieving level 6 or better was very high in comparison with the national average and broadly in line with the average for grammar schools. The proportion achieving level 7 or better was below that for grammar schools.

117. Attainment of students at the end of Year 9 is well above average. Results in the end of Year 9 tests are high because of the way in which the school prepares students for the tests. Students have a very good understanding of number and this supports their work in other areas of mathematics. They find the length of an unknown side of a triangle using Pythagoras' theorem and the mean of grouped frequency data. A few students are weaker in algebra but go on to solve simultaneous equations. Students carry out investigations. They have few opportunities to use ICT to enhance their learning in mathematics.

118. In relation to their attainment at the start of Year 7, students' achievement is satisfactory. For example, students in Year 7 extend their understanding of fractions and decimals, develop their algebraic skills as they write and solve simple equations and then inequalities. They learn to represent data in a variety of ways including pie charts and scatter diagrams and perform accurate constructions.

119. GCSE results have improved since the last inspection. In 2001, results were much higher than those nationally. The proportion of students gaining A*-C grades was below that for grammar schools. Students' performance in mathematics was broadly in line with their performance in their other subjects. The proportion of students achieving A*-C grades exceeded the target set by the school.

120. The standard attained by students at the end of Year 11 is well above the national expectation. Students retain their strengths in number. Higher-attaining students solve problems using the sine and cosine rules. They find areas under curves and gain an understanding of exponential functions. Lower-attaining students use trigonometry to work out angles and lengths. They transform formulae and solve quadratic equations but some students are less secure in algebra than in other areas of their work. Overall, students are weaker in proof and justification. Students still have limited opportunities to use ICT to enhance their learning in mathematics. Students build on the high standards which they attain at the end of Year 9 and achieve satisfactorily in Years 10 and 11.

121. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good overall. The quality of relationships is a strength and these factors have a positive impact on their learning. Students with special needs make satisfactory progress in line with their peers. Where there is additional adult support this increases students' progress.

122. Overall, the teaching observed was satisfactory. Teachers' subject knowledge is a strength, enabling them to give clear explanations from which students learn. Where the learning objectives are made clear, students know exactly what they should focus on and they learn effectively. Most lessons build suitably on students' previous learning experiences and this aids progression in learning. Occasionally where students, either individuals or a whole class, are repeating work which they have already mastered, this hinders their progress. Teachers generally recognise the range of abilities within a class and suggest different starting points for students when working exercises from the textbook. Teachers could, however, employ a greater range of teaching styles to enable students to learn more effectively.

123. As a result of the satisfactory teaching, students' learning is also satisfactory. Students are mostly well-motivated. They remain on task and sustain concentration and intellectual effort. Students learn to work systematically as in a Year 7 lesson where they were recording the outcomes of throwing two dice. Year 11 students systematically recorded their findings in their coursework investigation. Students have few opportunities to collaborate in their work. Students know their targets.

124. Students have opportunities to develop their literacy skills through reinforcement of the correct use of mathematical terms such as numerator and denominator. They occasionally have opportunities to explain their strategies, for example when approximating in a Year 8 lesson. Students make little use of the library and they have limited opportunities overall to develop their ICT skills.

125. Management of the subject is satisfactory. Day-to-day management of the department is sound but strategic leadership of the department is underdeveloped. The head of department undertakes a planned programme of lesson observations. Schemes of work are in place, written in modules, but the school recognises the need for these to be much fuller, especially in Years 10 and 11, and to include, for example, reference to additional resources and opportunities for the use of ICT. Improved schemes of work would assist teachers in planning appropriate learning experiences for all students, including the most able.

126. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory. Standards have risen in the tests at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE examinations.

SCIENCE

Overall, the quality of provision in science is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Attainment is high at the end of Year 9.
- Teacher subject knowledge is good.
- Management is good at monitoring teaching and learning and taking steps to improve achievement.
- Use of ICT in science is good.

Areas for improvement

- The faculty should continue efforts to increase GCSE performance at the higher levels (A* and A) particularly in Chemistry.
- Teaching methods of some staff limit the independence and achievement of some students.

127. Results of national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were very high in comparison with the national average. They have been consistently well above average or very high over the past five years. Student performance was broadly similar to that in English and mathematics.

128. Students' attainment on entry to the school is well above the national average. By the end of Year 9, attainment is also well above average. Over the last year there has been an increase in the number of students working at the very high level 8. This represents good achievement, to which a significant contribution is made by students' good attitudes to work and the textbook provision. Students in Year 7 showed very good understanding of forces and were able to discuss sophisticated concepts such as the observable universe, genetics, solubility, friction, up-thrust and air resistance.

Year 8 students showed good co-operative skills and knowledge and understanding of magnetism, including the magnetic properties of cobalt and nickel as well as iron. Year 9 students had a depth of knowledge of Earth in space and were able to show a deep understanding of forces through well word-processed work on the possibilities of sport in zero gravity. They also showed good graphical skills in work on cooling curves and Hooke's law.

129. The proportion of students obtaining a GCSE grade of A*-C is above the national average in biology, physics and chemistry. In 2001 this was also true in double science although this examination is only taken by a small number of students. Nationally results in separate sciences are high, because these courses are followed mainly by selective schools. Results in 2001 were higher than those of other grammar schools in double science and physics. They were comparable in biology and fell below only in chemistry. The proportion gaining A*-A grades was higher than average in physics, comparable in biology and fell below average only in chemistry. School trends show an increase, particularly since the year 2000, when the current faculty management took up post. The results represent good achievement, greatly contributed to by the very good student attitudes to work observed in Years 10 and 11.

130. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average. In many lessons students showed very good practical skills. They were able to structure their practical work at a very good pace. Examples included plasmolysis preparations and osmosis experiments where students were able to prepare specimens, weigh them, arrange them in labelled tubes of varying sucrose concentration and tabulate their results with considerable accuracy. Other classes were able to measure and collect data on a range of human variation. Students were observed using ICT with very good skill, such as using sensors to monitor acceleration due to gravity, using simulation programs to help plan investigations on rolling down slopes. Year 11 understanding of the technicalities of genetic engineering was well above average.

131. Relationships between students and teachers are good. Students exhibited good behaviour, a good pace of work and good learning, particularly in Years 10 and 11, where attitudes were very good. Students were keen to enter into class discussions and made sophisticated contributions when given the opportunity. Further good contribution to literacy was made by the Hodder science scheme, when for example, students were encouraged to write about scientific topics on the basis of controversial views. Attitudes to work were good across the ability range. Work samples indicated that lower-attaining students were producing work with good standards of presentation and valid understanding, which often exceeded national expectation. Numeracy was good. Students were strong on graphical ability and were able to carry out chemical and physics calculations, although there was some confusion about working out the line of best fit in some graphs.

132. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. In the best lessons, teachers use their good academic knowledge and good relationship with students to facilitate learning. This is particularly good in practical sessions. Gifted and talented students were suitably challenged through open ended investigation, the use of ICT and other information processing, especially in homework in Years 7 to 9 and coursework in Years 10 and 11. In a minority of lessons, teachers relied upon very good student attitudes to learning to cover for teaching strategies that were deficient. In these lessons, students compensated for less well-planned teaching by their ability and attitude to work, helped by the good provision of resources, especially textbooks. In some cases, explanations were muddled or ill thought out, yet nonetheless led to good learning. In these instances, too much teacher talk reduced the possibility of student independence and reduced the scope for able students to show what they are capable of. This factor may have led to the underachievement of GCSE grades at the highest levels. The faculty must consider how defects in teaching technique impinge on student learning and attainment.

133. In general, students make good progress throughout Years 7 to 11. The science department used ICT to track student achievement and underachievement and has recognised where weaknesses lie. The current faculty management has a very good sense of syllabus demand. They have introduced new curriculum schemes in Years 7 to 9 and in the separate sciences. The introduction of modular courses in Years 10 and 11 has focused attention on externally validated assessment. These changes have led to good improvement, which is likely to feed through into achievement over the next few years.

134. The management of the faculty is good. It has led to the creation of an effective team across the three science subjects. Support staff are well integrated and make an effective contribution. New teachers are well supported and contribute positively to the faculty. Resources are good and have improved over the past two years. Although the science section of the library is weak, good use is made of textbooks and reference material in laboratories. The points made in the last inspection report have been dealt with effectively; investigations are now done well, ICT skills have improved. The faculty management have monitored well and based their input on the need to raise achievement.

135. Accommodation is adequate, resources are good, health and safety are well dealt with, support staff make a good contribution to the functioning of the department.

ART AND DESIGN

Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Improved standards in GCSE examinations.
- Good opportunities for using computers in art and design lessons in Year 7.
- Students' good attitudes and behaviour.

Areas for improvement

- Use of assessment information to plan work, set targets for students, record and report National Curriculum levels and track their progress.
- Teaching and learning – raise expectations of the quality and quantity of work produced.
- Consistently implement policies on the use of sketchbooks and standards of presentation.
- Raise standards by the end of Year 9.

136. The standards indicated by the 2001 teacher assessments for students at the end of Year 9 were above the levels reported nationally. The standard of work seen during the inspection was broadly average. The standard of students' art and design work, as seen in sketchbooks and portfolios, does not fully reflect the standards they are capable of. When students enter the school their attainment in art and design is broadly average - below the standards in the core subjects. Most make sound progress in Year 7 but a high proportion do not sustain the same rate of progress throughout Years 8 and 9. Achievement year-on-year is unsatisfactory and standards are lower than they ought to be.

137. Students currently in Year 9 carry out research tasks, using books and the Internet, and many have a good grasp of artists' work and the factors that influence it. Some hand in carefully prepared work using personal computers, and some have sketchbooks and present their ideas using images and notes. Too many students either do not meet the deadlines set for handing in homework or present work that fails to meet an

appropriate standard. In some books, presentation is weak or there are gaps and pages of unfinished work. Occasionally students have downloaded text from the Internet that they do not fully understand. Students are asked to buy sketchbooks and some choose not to so their folders often contain loose sheets of paper and disorganised and unresolved work. Too much work does not show progressively improving standards or reflect the standards students' achieve in their other subjects. Overall achievement of all students, including those with special educational needs, is unsatisfactory.

138. The curriculum plan shows a reasonable balance of work covering different media and in three and two dimensions but in practice the lack of a specialist room for approximately half the time-tabled classes severely restricts the breadth of the curriculum offered. Opportunities to develop literacy and numeracy within the subject are satisfactory.

139. A recent development in Year 7, and one that students are very positive about, is the use of ICT. In one class, students' used computers to gather information and practise their research skills. They could select, combine images and text and apply different effects. The possibilities for extending this work, for example by layering students' own art-work and found images, have yet to be planned into a wider programme of art and computer-based work. There is considerable potential for developing critical and analytical skills in this context and for students to appraise and comment on their decision-making. This work is leading to good personal development and positive attitudes to the subject.

140. Very few students take the GCSE examination. Since the last inspection, standards have gone from well below average to well above average. In 2001, the percentage of A*-C grades was similar to other selective schools. Achievement of the small number of students who took the examination was satisfactory.

141. From the evidence gathered in lessons, looking at portfolios of work and talking to students about their work, standards in the current Year 10 and 11 classes could lead to above average examination results and sound achievement. However, there is a legacy of unsatisfactory provision that some students are finding it hard to recover from. For example, when students speak about how their work relates to the work of particular artists they generally give more thoughtfully considered responses than when they write about it. Some have not been used to using sketchbooks and annotating their work so the habit of recording their ideas, explaining them and posing questions are not well established. Students are poorly organised and there are cases of mislaid work and a loss of motivation.

142. Bringing an artist printmaker into school - to work with students on their preparatory studies prior to their timed examination - worked well last year and if repeated could boost the final outcome of the 2002 results. Analysis of why this approach has worked well is a necessary step towards achieving higher standards across all year groups and not just for the very small numbers taking a GCSE examination.

143. The quality of teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 to 11. Some of the teaching observed during the week of the inspection was good and some was sound. However, teaching fails to develop progressively skills, knowledge and understanding to a high enough level over the longer term. Some lessons are not challenging enough and loss of motivation leads some students to underachieve. There are inconsistent expectations about the amount and the quality of work students must complete and some hand in work that falls short of the expected standard but are rarely asked to resubmit it. Students learn best when pace is good, expectations are high and where they are set challenging work. In some lessons, time was made at the end of the lesson for students to reflect on the work covered during the lesson and to write a short review of the main points. This provided a good opportunity to consolidate what had been learned and for students to use a subject specific vocabulary to express themselves more precisely. Students generally have insufficient information about their National Curriculum level and what they could do to improve it. This holds back their progress and places limitations on their ability to work independently.

144. Management of the subject is satisfactory. Circumstances beyond the control of teachers have had a negative impact on standards. However, the monitoring of work and students' effort and work rate is weak. Satisfactory improvement has been made in some of the points raised in the last inspection. The work seen in GCSE lessons suggests that the downward trend in results has been stopped and that standards are showing signs of improving. The numbers opting into examination groups remains very small. In Years 7 to 9, teachers need to agree standards for National Curriculum levels so they can use the information to plan work, assess students' work more accurately and track their progress. Students' skills are weak – drawing, painting and presentation of work in sketchbooks would all benefit from more intensive teaching.

145. The library has a limited stock of suitable books and reference materials for students to borrow or work from and access to computers is limited and therefore holding back standards. Accommodation and resources are unsatisfactory, have a negative impact on students' attitudes and depress standards in all years.

146. Sketchbooks are a National Curriculum requirement in Years 7 to 9. It is inappropriate to ask students to buy them.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is **good**.

Strengths

- Attainment is well above the national average by the end of Year 11.
- Teachers subject knowledge is very good.
- Good individual support for all students.
- Good relationships between students and teachers.
- The level of planning is good.

Areas for improvement

- Opportunities for students to analyse existing products and to develop skills in market research.
- Planning of work to meet the needs of those who are gifted and talented.

147. Standards among students joining the school in Year 7 are broadly average, and at the end of Year 9 they are above the national average. Students in Years 7 to 9 reach above average standards across a range of activities including designing and making products in resistant materials, graphics, electronics and some limited opportunities in food and textiles. They follow the guidance provided by teachers well and generally respond very well to the worksheets and information provided in lessons. They develop a good range of drawing skills, and are beginning to apply these to other specialist areas in design and technology. The use of ICT is good. The learning and achievement of all students including those with special educational needs is good.

148. Achievement over time for students in Years 7 to 9 is good in both designing and making. Although students use the design process in all years, there is a stronger emphasis on this in Year 9. In general, students research their work well and good coverage of technical knowledge underpins the design work. This was seen in a Year 9 project where students were designing mechanical toys. They researched and covered the knowledge about mechanisms very well using textbooks, CD-ROMs, the Internet and knowledge learned in class as sources of information. However, there was less emphasis on analysing existing products to assess the range of ideas, materials and mechanisms used as a base on which to start their own designing. Their skills in doing market research to find the preferences of

potential users were less developed. As a result the range of ideas was somewhat limited.

149. GCSE results for both the short course and full courses in design and technology were well above the national average. The proportion of students gaining A* to C grades dropped slightly from that in 2000. Results were better in graphic products than in other specialist technology subjects. In the combined resistant materials and information technology course, results were above the national average. Students did not do quite as well overall in design and technology as in their other subjects. The overall standards of work seen during the inspection were well above average, indicating an improvement in students' research and investigative skills. Coursework is of very good quality. Students present each stage of their development work in detail and combine both designing and planning skills well. Practical skills are also of a good standard and students work confidently to master a good range of skills. This was seen in a resistant materials lesson, where students were designing and making a range of products using electronic sensors and mechanisms. The range included cat flaps, chicken coup flaps, and sweet dispensing mechanisms. Students analysed both the task and their research well. There were good examples of using the Internet for research, specialist computer software to support work in processing and presenting data and to produce detailed production drawings. Students then used a good range of construction skills to make their products demonstrating use of both traditional and modern methods of production. Students tested the various designs they produced and noted the good and weaker features of their work, in order to increase the quality of their final products. Achievement was good among all students, with accurate and well-developed plans from higher-attaining students and sound work from middle and lower-attaining students, which met the requirements of the course well. The achievement of one GCSE group has however been affected by staffing difficulties. Other staff in the department are helping to support the students to minimise the impact on their grades.

150. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. Lessons are well-planned. Teachers' provide clear objectives to guide students in their work and lessons are well structured to support students' learning. Specialist teachers have very good knowledge of their subject, and students accept their guidance with confidence. Lower-attaining students receive good individual support from teachers, and as a result, they are able to achieve levels in line with other students in the group. Teachers use a good range of strategies to enable students to develop skills in literacy. They emphasise the use of the correct technical terms and encourage the use of technical vocabulary associated with the subject. They prepare a good level of resources, which enables students, including those with special educational needs, to structure their writing effectively. This was seen in the guidance materials provided to ensure students followed all the basic stages of their design work. This is having a positive effect on the students' competence in literacy. They develop good skills in numeracy as they design, measure and mark out dimensions on to material. Teachers try to include all students in the learning activities, but some teachers lack a wide enough range of strategies to ensure that those who are gifted and talented are sufficiently challenged. Students develop a good level of skill in ICT, using the Internet, and resources such as scanners and digital cameras. They present work using desktop publishing and use spreadsheets to process and present data. All students in Year 8 experience the use of specialist software to control objects. Examination students use computer aided design and computer aided manufacturing processes. This is also being extended for students in Year 9. Although students are given overall targets for improvement on a long-term basis, the use of shorter more subject specific targets to raise achievement further is underdeveloped.

151. Students' attitudes and behaviour are very good and they respond well to teachers. They show enthusiasm and are keen to do well. Students concentrate very well in lessons and respond well to the high expectations of the teachers. There are very good relationships between teachers and students, which provide good conditions for learning.

152. Leadership and management of the department are very good. The head of department maintains good working relationships within the department, and staff work hard to maintain high levels of efficiency. The department has found difficulty in recruiting specialist staff and this has had an adverse impact on the learning of some groups. The head of department and other staff however, have tried to ensure that the impact has been minimised. Good monitoring of teaching and learning has had a positive impact on maintaining standards in the subject. There has been good improvement since the last inspection. The quality of teaching and learning has improved, as has the use of ICT in the subject.

GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **good**.

Strengths

- Very good GCSE results.
- The good quality of teaching and its impact on students' learning
- Good progress made since the last inspection.

Areas for improvement

- Wider use of ICT.
- The quality of some accommodation.

153. Students' standards in Year 7 are above average and they continue to make progress through Years 8 and 9. Teacher assessment at the end of Year 9 indicates that the standards of the majority of students are above average. Most students have a good knowledge of place; they handle mapping skills competently and have a good understanding of the complex differences between countries in the South and North. They are able to use statistical evidence to draw conclusions between countries like Japan and Bangladesh and many are able to draw sophisticated inferences from data like social indices. Geographical explanation is handled well and many students move on to more sophisticated explanation. Overall, most students achieve satisfactorily and have an enthusiastic and conscientious approach to geography.

154. The most recent GCSE results dipped a little below the previous years' excellent results. Nevertheless, results were very high in comparison with the national results and comparable with selective schools' results with 30 per cent of students attaining A* and A grades. These successes were gained despite significant staff change.

155. Current standards in Year 11 are similar and the department's target of 100 per cent A*-C grades appears attainable. Students achieve well. Written work is of good quality, often accompanied by well-drawn maps of places like Rochester or tourist routes in Snowdonia. Students effectively use

climate graphs and population pyramid diagrams to interpret geographical information. They have a good grasp of the diverse subject matter and the highest-attaining students are producing good quality geographical analysis. A significant majority of students are recognising geographical patterns and processes with a degree of sophistication. Lower-attaining students are dealing well with the explanations of geographical phenomena like coastal erosion and are given good opportunities in lessons to contribute effectively. Good progress is made in lessons where students are dealing with issues like the proposed locations for a new motorcycle manufacturing unit. Students possess a good knowledge of place location and can link contemporary events like the relocation of vacuum cleaner assembly plants from the UK to the Pacific Rim.

156. The quality of teaching and learning is good. All teachers have a wide and up-to-date knowledge of the subject and pass on to the students strong 'love' for the subject. A number of lessons take place in poor quality learning environments, in demountable accommodation, which prohibits independent research. Lessons were well-structured and learning objectives clearly stated at the beginning of lessons. Timed tasks gave students unambiguous targets and teachers reinforced these throughout the lesson with individual students. Teachers used penetrating questions to extend students' understanding of geographical processes like vulcanicity. Some lessons are too short for significant learning to take place and students have to use homework to complete tasks and consolidate their understanding. Textbooks are generally suited to the required level of enquiry. Teachers maintain a brisk pace to lessons and marking is supportive and outlines how students can improve. Fieldwork opportunities have developed and local site investigations are increasingly part of the curriculum. Students use computers effectively to word process project work and search the Internet for geographical information. Regular use of simulation packages, mapping software and other relevant geographical uses of ICT is being developed satisfactorily but is not yet fully embedded in the curriculum plans.

157. Students display good attitudes and behave impeccably; they listen well both to teachers and their fellow students. They work quickly and with the minimum of fuss, particularly in group activities. Literacy opportunities are developed using key words and the explanation and use of specialist terminology. Numeracy use is satisfactory with graphs reproduced in weather/climate and population studies. Mapping work also includes mathematical transformations. There is little evidence of high quality usage of the library by students. The limited number of students with special educational needs is well catered for through individual teacher support and the highest-attainers are provided with good quality extension activities.

158. The department has made good improvements since the last inspection. Teacher planning is secure and work in Years 7 to 9 challenges students and allows them to make progress. Leadership and management is good and teachers work together co-operatively for the development of the subject. The department has a good capacity for building on its current strengths.

HISTORY

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- High standards at GCSE in history.
- Some enthusiastic and collaborative teaching leading to good learning for individual students.

Areas for improvement

- Provision for high-attaining students.
- The quality of some accommodation.

159. Students enter the school with high literacy skills and develop knowledge and understanding and historical skills in Years 7 to 9. By the end of Year 9 students attain standards that are above the national expectation and their achievements are satisfactory. They show interest in their work, and take care with presentation. In Year 7, students examined the use of symbols of power and compared the style of portraits of Elizabeth I with photographs of twentieth century prime ministers or dictators. Year 8 students were able to argue for or against executing Charles I as if they were Members of Parliament. Others took the part of judges and were cautious and balanced in their views, thinking of the effect their decision would have on a divided kingdom. In Year 9, students carry out local research on the Medway towns during World War Two, using photographs, maps, diagrams and statistics. Some presented primary evidence of the part played by their great grandparents in the conflict, including war records, medals and ration books. Higher-attaining students showed greater understanding of the problems of recruiting to reserved occupations in wartime in the Medway dockyards.

160. By the end of Year 11, results at GCSE in history are well above the national average and in line with selective schools. The attainment of current Year 11 students is similar. Many more students study for GCSE history as an option than in the previous inspection. Students maintain good sets of notes and are well prepared for examinations. Year 10 students have made positive choices to study history based on their achievement or on their potential career options. They can compare modern leaders such as Mussolini with dictators from earlier periods such as Julius Caesar. They understand and can analyse sources of influence in the inter-war-years, evaluating the work of the League of Nations by its successes and failures in dealing with international incidents. Year 11 students studying the Holocaust discuss how far long-term Nazi intentions or pressure of events in Europe account for the genocide. They present their ideas articulately with evidence to support historical perspectives.

161. Although GCSE results are very good overall, a relatively small proportion of students achieve A* grades. Students with the potential for high grades are not always challenged sufficiently in lessons. Students with special educational needs are given support and encouragement by staff and their peers to make good progress. No work was seen which was below average. Overall, students' achievements are satisfactory.

162. The quality of teaching and learning is satisfactory. It was good or very good in around half of all lessons observed, and satisfactory in nearly all the rest. A strength of the teaching is that all teachers are knowledgeable, and use good resources ranging from textbooks to individually prepared packs of information. Teachers ensure that students do undertake written tasks and mark and comment in exercise books to help all to progress. Where care is taken to plan for oral responses, based on the students studying information for themselves, students can frame arguments and listen to each other and the teacher, being fully involved in their own learning. Where teachers use a wide range of techniques students can all be involved in discussion, group and pair work, and the higher-attainers can explore concepts and contrasts, such as the contradiction of the trial of a king in a kingdom. However, teaching is variable because not all lessons are planned sufficiently with the individual needs of students in mind. Some lessons lack sufficient pace or are dominated by the teacher talking or closing down questions. Students can become frustrated in such lessons, and they are given few opportunities to work at historical enquiry for themselves. They can think for themselves if offered opportunity to consider different points of view, but accept the authority of a teacher, in a passive way, when they are not challenged or inspired to put intellectual effort into oral or written tasks. Cultural diversity and the development of democracy are not sufficiently covered at present in the history curriculum, so opportunities to take a world view or compare the past with modern democratic structures are missed.

163. Attitudes and behaviour are generally good, with supportive relationships between teachers and classes and among students. Good attitudes and positive relationships in history also lead to enthusiasm

for the subject at GCSE.

164. The continuing development of literacy is well supported in history lessons, where key words are written on the whiteboard, and aims set for lessons, with recapitulation of the previous topic at the beginning, and revisiting the main points at the end of each lesson. Good use is made of writing frames to help students structure responses, and students with individual education plans receive appropriate support and make good progress. Some contribution is made to numeracy through chronology and timelines, the comparison of population and area of nations, and the interpretation of statistical data, especially in Years 10 and 11 for source questions at GCSE.

165. Collaborative work has been a strength of the department in the process of recent change of leadership. This has led to a raising of standards of achievement despite the upheaval. Leadership and management in this transitional phase has strengths and is satisfactory. A well qualified, comparatively inexperienced staff is committed to share good practice and develop relevant teaching expertise. Staff have a good range of expertise in ICT to aid history learning and the use of ICT is being satisfactorily developed within the department. There has been some significant improvement in the popularity and success of history in Years 10 and 11. Few aspects of the subject were identified as needing improvement in the last inspection and overall improvement has been satisfactory. Some history rooms provide good quality learning environments, but others, such as the demountables, are unsuitable or inadequate. The library is not adequate to meet the research needs of history.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards are above average at the end of Year 9.
- Systematic planning covers a good range of skills in ICT lessons.
- Good relationships between teachers and students create a positive climate for learning.
- Teachers provide good individual support for all students.

Areas for improvement

- Refinement and expansion of the provision for gifted and talented students.
- The amount of curriculum time for students doing the GCSE short course.
- The level of ICT skills used in subjects across the curriculum.

166. Standards are above national average levels at the end of Year 9. Achievement is good when compared to the average levels students attain when they join the school in Year 7. By the end of Year 9, all students, including those with special needs, achieve competence in the basic ICT skills of desktop publishing, use of the Internet, simple spreadsheets and databases. They use of a range of electronic resources such as scanners and digital cameras. Specialist teachers have good knowledge of the subject and generally provide a good structure to lessons. This structure supports students well in their learning and enables them to work through each task methodically and so master the main skills. Lower-attaining students cover a good range of basic techniques with good individual support from teachers. In Year 7 and 8 students are introduced to a broad range of ICT skills including multi-media presentations. In Year 9 they increase their knowledge of using databases and spreadsheets. In the work seen during the inspection, students show good understanding of the software they use. Higher-attaining students work independently and complete tasks faster than others, though students

whose skills are well above those of the rest of the class do not receive sufficiently challenging work to move them forward.

167. In 2001, the GCSE short course results in the information technology component of the combined design and technology and information technology course were broadly in line with the national average. This represents a drop from the results of 2000. The curriculum time allocated by the school for the GCSE short course is less than the average time allocated in other schools nationally. This means that students cannot complete all elements of the course in sufficient depth to gain the higher grades. As a result, achievement of students at this stage is satisfactory. Students following the GCSE course research and present their work well. Coursework folders contain evidence of a range of ICT skills to a good standard. All students learn to apply and use electronic resources such as scanners, digital cameras and the Internet to gather information and present this as part of their coursework. In Year 11, for example, the examination coursework involved students in designing computer systems to support a hotel managing wedding receptions. They identified how ICT could improve the efficient management of the company and used a range of software to design effective systems for seating plans, bookings and calculating overall costs. These systems were then tested to ensure their effectiveness. In class, students explain their work well and apply a good range of technical vocabulary, which they use accurately.

168. The quality of teaching and learning is good overall. Where the teaching is good, teachers plan and prepare work well, set clear learning goals and provide a good structure to lessons. This gives the students the opportunity to analyse what they have to do, and enables them to work through each stage of the task. Teachers use worksheets well to guide students through the work, and this helps them to focus on mastering the various functions of the software as well as achieving the main sections of the task. For example, students in a Year 9 lesson on spreadsheets, were guided through each stage of creating macros to link a calculator to perform simple calculations using a worksheet provided by the teacher. The teacher also demonstrated the procedure at the start of the lesson and students used the worksheet to follow the main stages of the process. Students use correct technical vocabulary when talking about their work and teachers use a range of methods to ensure students develop a good command of specialist terms and words. This helps lower-attaining students to secure a wide and relevant vocabulary. Students gain good practice in reading from a range of sources such as the Internet, textbooks and prepared worksheets. Schemes of work are well structured but provide insufficient guidance for less experienced staff, for example on how to support the individual needs of students with special educational needs and those who are gifted and talented. Teachers have good relationships with the students and include them all effectively in learning activities. However, less experienced teachers do not provide sufficient guidance for GCSE students about the examination mark scheme. Students in the main show very good attitudes and behaviour and respond well to the relationships they form with other students and adults in class.

169. The contribution of other subjects to students' ICT skills is satisfactory overall and meets National Curriculum requirements, but remains an area for development. There is very good work in science, where students use desktop publishing to present GCSE coursework, use the Internet for research and computer simulation to guide investigation and planning. They use light sensors in a data logging exercise to determine acceleration due to gravity. In design and technology, students use a range of electronic devices such as scanners and digital cameras, the Internet and CD-ROMs for research. In Year 8 students use software to control objects. Those doing examination courses use computer-aided-design and manufacture for making products. In modern foreign languages, students prepare multi-media presentations and use a data projector. Multi-media presentations are also used effectively to present students' research work in art and design in Year 7. In mathematics, spreadsheets are well used in Year 8. Some use of desktop publishing, the Internet and a range of digital resources was also seen in other subjects.

170. Leadership and management are good, ensuring consistency in teachers' approach. This is helping to raise standards. Specialist ICT teachers work well to maintain standards in very limited curriculum time. However, while there is some monitoring of teaching and learning the school has had to rely on unqualified and inexperienced staff to deliver the subject for some students. This has had a negative impact on standards in some classes. The school has made funding available to extend the computer network system and there is an above average number of computers per student. This has had a good impact on the learning. Very good support from technicians has had a very positive impact on the management of the department. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. The improved resources and quality of planning has enabled the use of ICT in other subjects across the curriculum to be satisfactory. A school assessment scheme now records achievement in ICT.

MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

Overall, the quality of provision in modern languages is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Standards in French at GCSE.
- Resources are very good.
- Teachers' subject knowledge and linguistic skills are very good.
- Recent staffing changes are resulting in a positive outlook and impetus for change.
- The contribution of the Language College to the community, feeder and partner institutions.

Areas for improvement

- Results in GCSE German and students' achievement in Years 10 and 11.
- More use should be made of National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades in marking.
- Ensure that the use of English in some lessons is reduced to an acceptable minimum, so that students' ability to speak with confidence in everyday situations is improved.
- Develop strategies for motivating those students in Years 9, 10 and 11 who are reluctant learners of two modern foreign languages.

171. Some of the feeder primary schools teach French but attainment on entry in Year 7 is uneven. The results in teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well above the national average in both French and German. Observations during the inspection indicate, however, that these teacher assessments do not accurately represent the current attainment of students. In most French lessons in Years 7 to 9 attainment is at least in line with national expectations and often above. Attainment in German lessons is generally average. Students taking the beginners' Spanish course starting in Year 9

are already working towards National Curriculum level 4. A scrutiny of students' written work in all three languages confirmed that most students are attaining above average standards.

172. In 2001, 99 per cent of students attained A*-C in French which is well above the average for all schools and above average for selective schools. In the same year, 64 per cent of students attained A*-C in German which is above the average for all schools but well below the average for selective schools. The attainment observed in French and German lessons in Years 10 and 11 was generally in line with national expectations. In one Year 11 German set, attainment was below average, however. In another Year 11 German class, most students could talk about their school timetable fluently and some gave some very extended and accurate replies to oral questions about school. The pronunciation of some students in German and French is unsatisfactory. From a scrutiny of students' written work in French and German, it is clear that the attainment of most higher and average attainers is above national expectations. Students' reading, writing and listening skills are better than their speaking skills. The high standards in writing, reading and listening account for the success in examinations. The lower standards observed in lessons are largely the result of weaker oral skills. Taking into account GCSE results, recorded work and lessons observed, achievement is good in French and just satisfactory in German.

173. The achievement in French and German of many students in Years 7 to 9 in relation to their ability is satisfactory. Achievement in Spanish is good. In a Year 7 French class, students understood most instructions and could understand a lot of detail in a recording about pets. In a Year 9 French top set, students were good at deducing the meaning of unknown vocabulary and coped well with unexpected situations. In a Year 8 German class, students repeated words and phrases with good pronunciation. Very occasionally students use the language spontaneously to make simple requests in French. They ask for paper or permission to take off their jackets. Such natural use of the foreign language as a normal means of classroom communication is not common, however. The reading skills of most students are good. They use dictionaries to look up the meaning of unknown words. Many students also use the French and German readers in the library. Most students make satisfactory progress in their writing skills in Years 7 to 9. By Year 9 higher and average attainers in French and German write short texts containing present and past tenses. They also write opinions and give reasons and have an awareness of basic grammatical patterns. Lower-attainers copy vocabulary, sentences and short dialogues fairly accurately and write short paragraphs when given sufficient support.

174. The teaching of French, German and Spanish was satisfactory or better in all lessons and very good in over a quarter of lessons. Overall it is good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Teachers generally speak exclusively in French, German or Spanish to develop students' listening skills. All lessons are well prepared and the pace is generally brisk. Teachers make good use of home-produced or published resources, which motivate students to work well. Good use is made of deadlines to keep students on task. Nearly all lessons are well matched to the interests of students and teachers frequently change materials and tasks to ensure that students can practise all language skills. The progress of all students is carefully monitored in lessons, which ensures that students with different learning needs make satisfactory progress. Relationships in lessons are very good. The very best lessons are taught with skill, enthusiasm and humour and consist of a variety of tasks and activities. Good use is made of overhead and data projectors, cassette and video recorders and computers. Some teachers do not use the foreign language consistently which reduces the opportunity students have for developing their speaking and listening skills.

175. Students' attitudes and behaviour are generally good and they are enthusiastic language learners, who show good levels of concentration, contribute orally, settle down to work quickly and remain on task. There are some lower-attaining students in Year 9 who are not highly motivated and who are experiencing some difficulty in learning two modern foreign languages. Some in Years 10 and 11

resent the fact that two modern foreign languages are compulsory and in one Year 11 German group attitudes were not positive mainly because their attainment in listening and speaking was low due to extended teacher absence. Some students are careless in their written work, which is often badly presented or not completed and they do not always do corrections. There is generally little evidence of redrafting after work has been corrected.

176. Trips to France and Germany, and the exchange with a German school, ensure that the department makes a good contribution to the cultural development of some students. The management and leadership of the department is effective. Language teachers are committed and enthusiastic and work very well together which has helped to raise standards of teaching. Resources are very good, but there are not enough specialist rooms. The department is currently developing a wide range of initiatives in connection with its Language College Status. It is liaising with primary schools to help them to raise awareness of the value of learning foreign languages, developing a network with local secondary schools, organising language courses for adults and master classes for Year 11 students in the area.

177. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. The teacher assessments in Year 9 are well above the national average. The use of assessment data to track student progress is more effective, but more use should be made of National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades in marking. Attainment in GCSE in French has remained consistently high. Attainment in German has deteriorated, however.

178. The Language College status has given the department a new challenge and the initiatives already in place and the plans already developed augur well for the future with the largely new team of teachers.

MUSIC

Overall, the quality of provision in music is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teaching is good; teachers are knowledgeable and enthusiastic.
- Good curriculum planning.
- Very good student-teacher relationships.

Areas for improvement

- GCSE examination results.
- The quality of some resources.
- Ensure a full range of musical activities that integrate performing, composing and appraising.

179. Teacher assessments for 2001 show that, by the end of Year 9, the attainment of the majority of students is significantly above national expectations. However, due to staffing problems these assessments were not carried out accurately and did not match the standard of work seen during the inspection, which was found to be average. In GCSE examinations for 2001 the proportion of students achieving the higher grades A*-C was well below average. All candidates entered for GCSE examinations gained A*-G grades which is above the national average. However, as the number of candidates was small, comparison with national averages is statistically unreliable.

180. Inspection evidence shows standards at the end of Year 9 are average with a small minority of students achieving beyond national expectations. However, standards of students in Year 7 and 8 are above expectations. This difference in standards can be attributed to the staffing problems the subject has recently suffered. The position is now stable and students in Year 7 and 8 have not been affected by the same level of disruption. In Years 7 to 9 students gain practical experience of the concepts of music through a well-planned series of topics devised by the teachers. Students know how to combine musical devices appropriately to compose music. They understand the basic elements of music such as timbre and texture and incorporate these into their compositions when working collaboratively in small groups. Year 7 and 8 students have a developing vocabulary of technical musical language. Higher-attaining students can control sounds effectively with an awareness of the different parts within their group. In a Year 8 lesson two boys structured their piece of medieval style music sensitively, incorporating a rhythmical drone and well thought out melodic and rhythmic lines. They then performed it confidently to the rest of the class who listened with interest.

181. There is some variation in students' attainment and previous musical knowledge when they enter the school, but generally their performance skills are above average. The new music scheme and enthusiastic teaching is quickly giving them a common base. In relation to their abilities, students' achievement is satisfactory. Students with special educational needs are presented with appropriately challenging work and achieve good standards in relation to their previous levels of attainment. Musically talented students are identified within lessons but they are not always challenged by the set tasks and could be extended further. Contributions to literacy skills are well developed with reference to key words, simple musical vocabulary and the creation of song lyrics. There is little reference to the development of numeracy skills in planning or practice.

182. Standards in Years 10 and 11 are above average. The poor examination result for 2001 can be attributed to the recent severe staffing problems. Entries at GCSE are low for the size of school. The majority of students in Year 11 are reaching high standards in performing as was demonstrated by a very musical performance of "Windmills of your mind" on the electric-acoustic guitar during assembly. The more musically talented create compositions that are well structured, highly musical and genuinely inspired. This was demonstrated by a Year 11 folio of compositions based on the theme of war. It contained a variety of styles including a triumphant march for brass and voices, a 1940s pastiche sentimental song and a skilfully structured highly emotional piece for string quartet, piano and chorus entitled "Unable to stand, unwilling to fall" inspired by the atrocities of the Holocaust. The musicianship displayed in the content of these pieces was of a level beyond that of GCSE. Year 10 students are also achieving above expectations. They can identify the basic elements of serialism and minimalism music, commenting on the differences in style. Higher-attaining students know the key components of melody and harmony and how to apply them to their compositions. They perform to high standards on their chosen instruments. There is good use of music information technology within Years 10 and 11.

183. Students learn well because teaching is consistently good and on occasions very good. Teachers are enthusiastic musicians. Music teaching is characterised by very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and this is used to plan lessons effectively. In very good lessons teachers build students' confidence with effective use of praise as they circulate well to ensure that they are working hard. Time and change of activity are managed crisply to maintain good pace. Lessons are well-planned with a good variety of activities. They have good openings with clear learning objectives and usually end with a summary to reinforce learning. Speaking and listening are taught well. There is an active response to challenge and, in the best lessons, hard work and fun are closely linked. The students enjoy the practical activities and participate willingly. Very good relationships mean that lessons focus fully on learning in a pleasant atmosphere with students freely contributing appropriate suggestions about their own work and that of their peers. Their attitude to the subject and general behaviour in lessons is very good. Students are supportive of each other and work productively at a good pace. Teachers

know their students well and ensure that the work is well matched to students' needs. They make sure that all students are included in the lesson so that they are able to experience success and celebrate their own achievements. Students are able to assess their own and others' work and use this evaluation to improve their musical skills. Classroom performances are regularly recorded to ensure there is evidence of progress in performing and composing. However, the quality of the recording equipment is unsatisfactory. Homework is regularly set to enhance the work undertaken in class.

184. Music provision is now effective for all students. The new head of department has very good management skills, and is already having a positive impact on standards, well supported by a newly qualified teacher. They work well together and have a clear vision for the future of the subject. The developing schemes of work are exciting and highly musical. Assessment procedures have already improved and now relate directly to the National Curriculum levels. This should ensure more accurate future assessments. The department has undergone severe staffing disruption over the last two years and this has had a detrimental effect on standards. The new staff team are enthusiastic, committed musicians and through their determination the subject is beginning to flourish once more. The number of students receiving instrumental lessons and attending extra-curricular activities is low, but the interest in these activities is increasing. The positive ethos within the department is slowly repairing the damage previously caused and students now enjoy music lessons again.

185. The department has made good progress in most areas since the last inspection. The time allocation for the subject in Years 7 to 9 is now adequate. Resources have improved with the purchase of new textbooks and five new computers with sequencing and score writing software. The library has few up-to-date music books and as a result is seldom used by students studying GCSE or A-level music. Accommodation has significantly improved, with two good-sized teaching rooms and several practice rooms available. Unfortunately, as these rooms are used for the teaching of other subjects, keyboards and other equipment have to be put away at the end of each session. This can waste time and restricts the planned use of the rooms. As a result, some lessons are planned in a way that segregates the theoretical and practical aspects of the programmes of study. This hinders the delivery of a range of musical activities that integrate performing, composing and appraising.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching which enables students to learn effectively.
- Student attitudes to learning are very good
- Extra-curricular provision is very good.

Areas for improvement

- GCSE results.
- The quality of accommodation.
- Opportunities for students to target and improve their performance, particularly at GCSE, by being more aware of their attainment.

186. Students enter the school with skills that are above average in physical education. In 2001 teacher assessments of standards at the end of Year 9 were well above average compared with schools nationally.

187. GCSE in physical education has been introduced since the last inspection. In 2001, GCSE results were below average when compared with national results and below the GCSE results achieved by

students in 2000. Students did less well in physical education than in most of their other subjects.

188. The work seen during the inspection shows that the standards attained by students at the end of Year 9 are above average when compared with national results but not as high as suggested in the teacher assessments. Teachers have been over-generous in their assessments. Students achieve satisfactorily in comparison with their standard on entry into the school. For example in Year 7, students' body position and co-ordination of the stick and ball is good in hockey but stopping and receiving the ball is often variable in accuracy and control. Overall students still perform skills above expected levels. Students acquire the skills and understanding to improve their performance. In a Year 8 rugby lesson, students were confident in their interchange of passes and exhibited good timing, working above expected levels. By Year 9, students in a swimming lesson were experimenting to discover the best way to get a racing start in the water; they were able to build on previous learning to understand the effect of streamlining the body.

189. In the current Year 11, the whole cohort is still being entered for the GCSE course. Students' overall work is average. In Year 10, physical education GCSE has become one of the options, which is more consistent with the national picture. Most students' work is above average and their achievement overall is satisfactory. In a Year 11 class, students demonstrated effective skills in basketball. They have a satisfactory knowledge of the rules of the game. High-attaining students have good spatial awareness which helps them achieve very good dribbling technique. Lower-attaining students lack good hand/eye co-ordination so that dribbling is not so effective and rules are easily infringed.

190. High-attaining students achieve well because teachers are aware of students' strengths; many of these students attend activities within the very good extra-curricular programme. Teachers challenge them so team and individual skills are above average. Lower-attaining students and students with special educational needs achieve satisfactorily because teachers maintain a balance of ability within practice and team activities so that skills are well demonstrated and repeated and examples of good performance are copied and learned. Teachers speak clearly, repeat teaching points and help individuals by offering alternative explanations.

191. Overall the standard of teaching and learning observed was good. Teaching and learning in Years 7, 8 and 9 are particularly effective. Here teachers concentrate on raising standards and extending skills. Lessons are well-planned and well organised. Students are effectively focused on objectives and understand the value of evaluation. Teachers have high expectations of students and yet are caring. In one Year 7 lesson, in poor weather conditions, a teacher was quick to notice a student who had decided to stand alone in goal. The student was rapidly included with the rest of the group so that he would not remain isolated and become colder. Students' learning was good in a Year 8 table tennis lesson when the teacher's good planning gave opportunities for differentiation so that students at dissimilar levels could improve their skills and good progress was made during the lesson. Opportunities for learning are greatly enhanced by the very good provision of extra-curricular activities.

192. Any weaknesses are concerned with teachers' inconsistent use of basic skills to assist students to learn effectively. There were good examples of use of literacy in some lessons but this is often incidental within the planning. Students are given few planned opportunities to enhance numeracy skills. Teacher assessment is done at the end of modules and reported to parents but students are not always aware of levels and grades for self-evaluation, self-targeting and improvement.

193. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good and most students are well motivated to achieve well. Students enjoy their physical education lessons and this helps them to learn well.

194. Leadership and management of the department are good. The physical education department

achieved Sportsmark Gold in 2000. Teachers work well together and exchange good practice. The strong team of teachers are mutually supportive and well assisted by governors and parents who, through their commitment to the school, enable parts of the curriculum to take place away from the school site. Provision of resources is satisfactory with some good books available for student use in the department. Insufficient supplementary material is provided in the library. Digital equipment is available for use in the department but there is inadequate access to computers. Accommodation is unsatisfactory. The hall is used for a variety of purposes and preparation time for its use by the physical education groups takes valuable time from the lesson. The gymnasium is small and drab; floor markings are worn away. Outdoor facilities on site are shared but are generally satisfactory although the football field is undersized. Offsite facilities, such as the all-weather pitch provision, is good and within easy reach of the school but other facilities are too far distant to allow viable provision for activities like swimming to take place. Teachers make the best use of the facilities available.

195. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. Assessment and recording is now in place although students' self-assessment is still an area for further development. Accommodation remains a problem with insufficient indoor accommodation and excessive travel to some outside venues.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in religious education is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Good subject knowledge of the head of department.
- Good relationships between experienced staff and students.
- Good teaching leads to high standards in GCSE classes.

Areas for improvement

- Provision in Years 10 and 11 to meet statutory requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus.
- Make more use of local resources to support the teaching of religious education.
- Further planned use of opportunities afforded by ICT.

196. Standards of work of current students in Year 9 are in line with expected standards. In a lesson seen on ultimate questions, the teacher's imaginative demonstration of the first cause argument allowed the students to be able to acknowledge its strength and why it may present difficulties for some. In their written work, higher-attaining students clearly wove Christian perspectives into discussions of crime, punishment and forgiveness, although lower-attaining students did not always

meet this challenge in their follow-up writing. By the end of Year 9, students will have made satisfactory progress given their starting points in Year 7. They demonstrate a sound knowledge and understanding of the key traditions and beliefs of Christianity. This will extend to the other major religions also, in line with the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus. During the inspection, however, little teaching or learning was seen which related to other faiths as, in Years 7 to 9, these are planned predominantly into the summer term's schemes of work.

197. The entire year group was entered for the GCSE short course in 2001. The results were below the national average. This is a significant fall from the previous year. The department experienced some staffing difficulties during this time and this is reflected in the results. The school no longer enters all students for the short course. Curriculum time in Years 10 and 11 is currently significantly less than that recommended by the local Agreed Syllabus. The school therefore fails to meet statutory requirements for the provision of religious education.

198. In Years 10 and 11, there is a combination of core provision for all students and full option GCSE groups. The Year 11 full option GCSE class is working well to meet their high anticipated target grades, underlined by their most recent test results. In one observed lesson, the higher-attaining students were successful because their observations and evaluations of capital punishment were articulated confidently, both in discussion and subsequent writing. Similarly, most students were aware of the need to relate questions of crime and punishment to religious teachings. However, overall, standards of work seen in Year 11 for those students not taking the GCSE option were below national expectations. In a core religious education lesson, students' attitudes to the subject impeded their willingness to come to terms with the serious questions being asked about Creation stories and explanations. The marked work of Year 10 students shows coverage of a range of significant issues such as the world community, death and existence, and the life and teaching of Jesus. There is insufficient depth, however, for students' to make expected progress. The inadequate provision of time therefore contributes to standards of achievement in the core being unsatisfactory.

199. During the inspection, teaching was always at least satisfactory and often good. Where teaching was good so was learning. For example in Year 10 GCSE class, confidence and enthusiasm for the subject allowed the teacher to structure learning activities so that students' developed knowledge and understanding of the moral issues involved in decisions about abortion. The subsequent writing tasks reinforced this. In a good Year 8 lesson on the meaning of Lent, the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject, effective explanation and challenging questioning drew the students on to understand the sacrifice of Jesus and the relevance this holds for our lives today. Where teaching was only satisfactory, so was the learning. For example, in a Year 9 lesson on questions of life and death, some students remained off task and unmotivated for periods of time. The work set for the class did not meet the wide needs of the students. As a result, some boys' personal reflections on these big issues were interrupted, and not all students achieved as much as they might have. Students with special educational needs, and those who are identified as gifted, are recognised by teachers although there are not always planned activities to meet their needs beyond the work of the whole class. The department handbook has policies on literacy and numeracy in line with school aims. During the inspection there was evidence of these being applied, for example through the emphasis on key terms being correctly spelled.

200. Since the last inspection, time allocated for religious education in Years 7 to 9 has improved, but not in Years 10 and 11. The introduction of the Medway levels of attainment for religious education in Years 7 to 9 has given more information for students on their progress and attainment.

201. Leadership and management at department level are good. The head of department understands well the demands of the local Agreed Syllabus and the examination syllabuses in Years 10 and 11. He

gives good guidance to teachers who teach religious education in Years 7 to 9. The new schemes of work have been developed within the framework of the recently adopted Medway Agreed Syllabus. The department development plan, recognises the value of enriching the religious education curriculum through visits to places of worship and other religious significance. Similarly, students' learning will benefit from further planned use of opportunities afforded by ICT. There is need for a stimulating range of texts in the library to promote further study. However, improvement is unsatisfactory because the amount of curriculum time in Years 10 and 11 remains insufficient. This is having a negative impact on standards.

PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM

In the inspection, thirteen subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The table below shows entry and performance information for courses completed in 2001.

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	5	100	62	0	15	1.6	1.5
Physics	2	50	52	50	4	2.0	0.9

GCE A-level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	29	76	87	21	43	3.7	5.8
Chemistry	10	100	90	30	43	6.0	5.9
Biology	8	88	88	38	34	5.8	5.3
Physics	24	96	88	33	40	5.0	5.7
Design and technology	11	100	91	73	30	7.8	5.4
Business studies	31	94	92	45	32	6.3	5.5
Economics	9	100	89	56	36	6.4	5.5
Physical education	8	100	92	37.5	25	5.5	5.1
Leisure and tourism	7	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a	13.7	10.1
Art and design	3	100	96	67	46	8.7	6.6
Music	2	100	93	50	35	5.0	5.7
Geography	19	100	92	47	38	5.9	5.7
History	23	100	88	4	35	4.4	5.5
Other social studies	21	100	87	38	34	6.1	5.3
English	19	100	95	53	37	6.6	5.9
Communication studies	12	92	93	0	31	3.8	5.5
French	6	83	89	17	38	5.3	5.6
German	2	50	91	0	40	3.0	5.8

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

The focus was on A and AS-level mathematics and biology. Work in mathematics for scientists, chemistry and physics was also sampled. Students studying AS-level science courses and who are not studying AS-level mathematics have one lesson a week of mathematics to support their science by studying topics such as permutations of a simple set. Provision is satisfactory. Students have the opportunity to develop relevant mathematical skills but not always in the context of science.

Overall results in A-level chemistry in 2001 were above average. However, the proportion of students gaining the highest grades was lower than that found nationally. The teaching and learning in the lessons observed were sound. A lesson on polarity of covalently bonded compounds was accurately taught, although students were not given much opportunity to participate independently.

Overall results in A-level physics in 2001 were average. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades was below that found nationally. The teaching and learning observed were good. Students were engaged in excellently managed course work, which included a Saturday visit to the medical physics facilities at Medway Hospital. This project contributed very well to knowledge of the role of physics in the community. It allowed more able students to respond to the self-chosen challenge of producing work on magnetic resonance imaging. The Salters' A-level course, which stimulated this work, is a well-chosen improvement to physics curriculum.

Mathematics

Overall, the quality of provision in mathematics is **just satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers have secure subject knowledge and give clear explanations.
- Students have good attitudes to their work.
- Current standards show improvement.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in A-level examinations are not high enough.
- A greater range of teaching styles would enable students to learn more effectively.

202. The inspection covered the courses in A-level and AS-level mathematics. Modules are offered in pure mathematics, mechanics and statistics.

203. Results in A-level mathematics have fluctuated in recent years, being below or well below the national average. In 2001, they were well below the national average. The proportion of students gaining A or B grades was below that nationally. Students performed less well in A-level mathematics than in their other subjects. Very few female students study A-level mathematics each year. The number of candidates taking AS-level mathematics each year is too small to be significant. The overall prior attainment of students embarking on sixth form courses is similar to national expectation.

204. Standards in the work seen during the inspection both in lessons and in the student work sample indicate that standards are broadly at national expected levels. Standards are currently higher than in the A-level examinations. In pure mathematics, students are strongest in their work on partial fractions, using trigonometrical identities and co-ordinate geometry. They are weaker in integrating and differentiating exponential functions and some harder trigonometrical functions. In mechanics they are stronger in topics such as vectors and momentum but less good at some statics topics such as a particle on an inclined plane. In relation to their attainment on entry to the course, students' achievement is satisfactory.

205. Students' attitudes and behaviour are good overall. They demonstrate good attitudes to their work and show respect, but have little opportunity to take initiative.

206. The quality of teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and this enables them to give clear explanations. For example, in a Year 13 lesson clear explanations enabled the students to understand how to derive Simpson's rule for finding an approximation for the area under a curve. Teachers set a brisk pace and students respond by working effectively as in a Year 13 lesson on the equations of motion for a particle moving in a circle. Most lessons have an extended teacher input without students having the opportunity to consolidate major concepts. Students are compliant, willing learners. They sustain concentration even when there are few opportunities for interaction. A weakness in teaching is that students are given few opportunities to develop as individual learners. This is because teachers use too limited a range of teaching and learning styles.

207. The use of ICT to support learning in mathematics is underdeveloped although there is some use of graphic calculators. Students make little use of the library to support their work in mathematics. Students know how well they are doing. They know their target grades and which parts of the syllabus they need to work on to improve. They feel well supported in their work and feel that they can get extra help if they need it.

208. The leadership and management of the subject have not been effective in raising standards in A-level examinations and overall improvement is unsatisfactory since the last inspection.

Biology

Overall, the quality of provision in biology is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Attainment in biology A-level is higher than the national average and the number of students taking the course has risen markedly since 2000.
- Schemes of work and effectiveness of assessment have been improved.
- Students feel well supported and given good guidance on their achievement.

Areas for improvement

- Some staff have not adjusted their teaching to a wider range of student attainment.
- Quality of teaching and written work in Year 13.

209. The inspection covered AS and A-level classes and work samples in both Year 12 and Year 13.

210. The number of students taking A-level biology in 2001 was small. Their results were higher than

the national average and the proportion of A and B grades was also higher. Their results were exactly what would be expected from their GCSE grades. In previous years the success rate fluctuated with very small groups of students. Since that time, a determined recruiting campaign has increased the number of students studying biology to 34 and there are two groups in Year 12, with a significant number of students attracted from other schools.

211. Year 12 attainment meets national expectations. Predicted grades cover the whole spectrum from grade A to N. Students are accepted with C grades in double science. This is commendable from the point of view of inclusion. Its result is that the biology groups in Year 12 are equivalent in ability to that in a comprehensive school. Some students, particularly the girls from other schools, reported an initial difficulty in getting to grips with the course since the gulf between AS work and double science is greater than that with biology GCSE. Their perception was that the initial difficulties are being overcome, helped by clear guidelines on the syllabus demands of the subject. They were able to conduct practical work on locusts in a systematic way and also to convey accurate knowledge and understanding of mitosis and meiosis. Their work was well structured to the modules covered, contained many well-answered examination questions and was well guided by teacher comment and suggestion of study techniques. Overall, Year 12 students' achievements are good.

212. Year 13 attainment is below expectation. Work observed on genetics was barely at GCSE standard and only a few students were able to cope with the questions set. They were less well structured in their work and less well guided. Achievement in relation to students' various starting points is only just satisfactory.

213. Teaching and learning were satisfactory overall. Four teachers, including a newly qualified teacher, contributed to post-16 teaching. There were good aspects of teaching including academic and syllabus knowledge and enthusiasm. However some teachers, particularly in Year 13, have not come to grips with the comprehensive nature of the intake in the sixth form. Expectations that able students can provide their own structure and guide their own learning, which are partially justified in Years 7 to 11, are not justified in the sixth form. There is a need to improve teaching methodology and to base it securely on detailed assessment of students' prerequisite skills.

214. Overall assessment is good, and well directed to the needs of the AS and A-level modules, with the exception mentioned in the above paragraph. Good guidance is given within the department on learning strategies including those needed in investigative coursework. Attitudes of the students are good and their perception of the subject is positive. Relationships were good in all lessons seen.

215. The management of the department is good and has implemented considerable improvements since the last inspection. This is seen in choice of syllabus and textbook, student support, resourcing, examination arrangements and in monitoring and tracking student and teacher performance. Remaining inconsistencies in teaching quality, however, are impeding the progress some students can make. The use of ICT in the sixth form is less strong than in the main school and students rely on textbooks rather than the sparse provision in the library.

ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING

The focus was on design and technology AS and A-level.

Design and technology

Overall, the quality of provision in design and technology is **good**.

Strengths

- Standards are well above the national average.
- Students have very good opportunities to use ICT.
- Relationships between teachers and students are very good.
- There is very good individual support for all students.

Areas for improvement

- Development of students' skills in analysing existing products and market research to help extend the development of their own ideas.

216. The A-level results in the product design course in 2001 were well above the national average. The AS-level results in 2001 were closer to the national average.

217. In the work seen during the inspection, the attainment of students in Years 12 and 13 was well above the national average. This is reflected in the well above average A-level results in 2001, showing the success of the department's recent work to raise standards. The majority of students who choose to do the product design course, have covered the graphics products course in design and technology at GCSE level. This means that their work has been mainly centred around the use of modelling materials and they are less experienced in using the skills required with resistant materials which they encounter with the AS-level and A-level product design course. They work hard to gain the level of skills necessary. However, by the time they have to enter the AS examination at the end of the first year of the course, these skills are not fully developed. Students' achievements are satisfactory in Year 12 and good in Year 13. Coursework is closely linked to examination requirements and teachers encourage students to follow the examination mark scheme. This ensures that all elements of the course are covered and students produce work of very good quality.

218. Teachers provide good opportunities for students to develop their basic skills, and to increase the complexity and refinement of their work in product design in the second year of the course. Students analyse tasks and research knowledge to good depth using a range of sources. All students establish links with clients from various parts of the community and this creates a more realistic approach to negotiating the features for their designs. Students have highly developed graphics skills and the standard of presentation of coursework is very good. The ability to analyse a wide range of products and then use the information in their own design work is less well developed. As a result, students provide less information on the limitations of other products or how their own designs improve on the

features of similar existing products. Students apply the design process well and use a range of specialist statistical data, for example the standard measurements of the body, to ensure accurate dimensions and sizing of products, particularly those designed for small children. British Standard guidelines for manufacturing are well used to plan production. Students' ability to apply the design process and to discuss their work with the teacher has a positive impact on the standards attained. Teachers support students very well on an individual level. Working drawings and plans are well annotated, and students explain the development of their products in depth.

219. The quality of teaching and learning in Years 12 and 13 is very good overall. Teachers have very good knowledge of the subject and the examination requirements. Good emphasis is placed on the development of advanced skills in both designing and manufacturing. The structure of lessons is good with a mixture of teaching the whole group as well as working with students on an individual basis. Lessons have clear objectives for students' learning, well linked to individual needs and to the specialist information needed for projects. Teachers plan well to enable students to extend their knowledge and skills. They encourage the use of ICT to increase the quality and standard of work. During lessons, students show confidence in using a variety of ICT skills, for example computer aided design and computer aided manufacturing resources to plan and produce products such as a design for a lap top computer. The majority of students use ICT well to process and present data from research work, and use specialist design software to prepare design drawings that are comparable with industrial standards. Students are familiar with a wide variety of technical terms associated with the subject, and apply them accurately in their written work. Writing and numeracy skills are used effectively. The very good relationships between students and their teachers have a positive impact on their learning. Students show a high level of interest and feel they are well supported by their teachers. As a result, they discuss their work in depth with both the teachers and technician, and readily take on board the help and guidance they receive.

220. The management of the subject is very good. The head of department has focused on raising standards. Schemes of work are well linked to the work in class. Systems to monitor the achievement of students following both A-level and AS-level courses are good. Regular reviews of work enable students to discuss their progress in depth with their teachers and enable them to focus on areas for development. This has had a positive impact on learning. They evaluate their own strengths and weaknesses as they progress. The very good teaching and learning in the sixth form has raised standards, as reflected in the A-level results of 2001. There is regular monitoring of both teaching and learning. Improvement since the last inspection is good. The A-level results are now above the national average and the AS-level course is well established.

BUSINESS

The focus was on AS and A-level business studies. Work in economics was sampled. The 2001 A-level economics results were above average. The proportion of students gaining the highest grades was above that found nationally. AS-level results indicate that students are achieving above expectation. A-level results have shown good improvement over the three previous years. Scrutiny of work indicates that learning is good as a result of effective teaching. Students' written work shows that they are making good progress and developing a good understanding of economic issues. This was evident in conversations with students, when they were able to discuss confidently a range of economic issues, for example inflation and its effect on the economy and the consequence of the events of September 11th 2001 on the stability of currencies. Students have opportunities to visit monetary institutes and a visit to the Bank of England has widened their understanding of issues concerned with the single currency.

Business studies

Overall, the quality of provision in business studies is **very good**.

Strengths

- Significantly improved A-level results in 2001.
- Very good standards of work by Year 13 students.
- Course retention rates which are excellent.
- The contribution the department makes to extra-curricular activities.
- The use of assessment data to improve standards.

Areas for improvement

- The departmental handbook needs to be reviewed and improved so that it serves as a useful, working document.
- More regular monitoring of teaching to ensure that all lessons are sufficiently challenging, especially when economic theory is being covered.

221. In 2001, students sat examinations in both AS and A-level business studies. AS results were at least good with a pleasing number of students gaining A and B grades. A-level results were a significant improvement on those gained in the previous year. For grades A and B, results were well above the national average, but were in line for grades A-E. The results for male students were well above average for grades A and B and similar to the national average for grades A-E. Some female students were entered for this examination, but numbers were small and comparisons to national averages are invalid. Further analysis of the results in 2001 shows that the average points scored by students were well above the national average and that most students achieved well, gaining final grades that were better than forecast from their GCSE results two years earlier.

222. Standards of present students in Year 12 are average overall, and are well above average in Year 13. However, standards of attainment in Year 12 do vary. Some students, especially a small number of female students, are recording standards of work that are well above average. They have already developed good analytical skills, have a good understanding of relevant theory and are able to apply their ideas to case studies. Other students have less well-developed skills and, in one Year 12 group, the standards of work from some male students was below expectations. Their lack of maturity and their desire to trivialise some aspects of theory covered adversely affected the quality of their work. In Year 13, students work seriously and sensibly. They have developed a good understanding of relevant business theory, which they are able to apply confidently to specific situations. For example, in a lesson on international competitiveness students were using terms such as 'unique selling points' and 'JIT' (just-in-time) in an appropriate business context. For standards to improve further, however, all students need to improve their knowledge and understanding of economic theory. Observations of lessons, and samples of work seen, both showed that the vast majority of students are making good progress in their work. They are gaining in knowledge and understanding and over time the quality of

work, especially written work, is improving.

223. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teaching was at least satisfactory in all lessons seen; and good or very good in the majority. Many strengths in teaching contribute directly to the quality of learning. In the most effective lessons, teachers planned well and ensured that expectations were high and appropriate challenges set. Lessons contained a series of tasks and were focused on the students who were involved in problem solving and similar exercises that required their participation. For example, in a good Year 12 lesson on production techniques, students had to analyse a set of data that offered some conflicting messages on the success of a firm's policies. All students worked well. The lesson made a very good contribution to developing key skills, involving literacy, numeracy and presentational skills. The students applied their theoretical understanding well making appropriate references to 'lean' production methods and 'continuous improvement processes'. Evidence of good quality learning was shown by their frequent references to the Japanese concept of 'kaizen'. This concept was used correctly by a number of students. In a very good Year 13 lesson, all students made rapid progress in their knowledge and understanding of competition through a short business game. The students worked well in small groups and they evaluated their work well, making references to various business concepts. Learning in this lesson was very good.

224. Where teaching was occasionally less effective, the pace of lessons was slower and the evaluation of the work undertaken concentrated on the effort made rather than the content of the analysis offered. There were a number of instances where students made rather bland statements based on a partial understanding of economic theory. For example, sweeping statements such as 'rising costs will lead to lower profits' and 'a falling exchange rate will benefit all British exporters', were not challenged. This means that more subtle nuances are not explored and, ultimately, this may affect the final grades gained.

225. Business studies benefits from very good management. The department did not feature in the previous inspection report and the present head of department has only been in post for a short time. However, many strengths can be identified. Assessment procedures are very good. All students are set minimum target grades based on their GCSE results and progress against this target is measured regularly. The support and encouragement offered to students is reflected in the excellent course retention rates. Over the last three years all students who started a business course have progressed to the final examination. Other strong features include the support and encouragement offered to a member of staff who is new to teaching and the contribution made to extra-curricular activities. For example, sixth form students recently visited a major industrial site in Belgium to study mass production techniques. The department also competes in the Young Enterprise award scheme as well as entering a competition run by The Bank of England. Considerable success has been recorded in the former. The school has been area champion and one student recently won acclaim at the county finals for the quality of his presentation. The current departmental handbook is not a working document. Much material presently contained in this document is superfluous. This needs to be urgently reviewed to ensure that all relevant policies are clearly set out.

INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

ICT was not one of the subjects inspected in detail. However, lessons were sampled and students' work scrutinised. The overall provision for the A-level course in information technology is good. The A-B grades in 2001 were below the national average and the A to E grades were broadly average. The results of the AS-level examination for 2001 were above the national average. Students who took the course were disadvantaged as a result of them doing only a short GCSE course in information technology in Year 11. It was a big step to increase their skills to A-level standard in a very short time.

The teaching and learning observed was good and students were well supported by teachers to work at the level appropriate for the examination. Good relationships between students and staff created good opportunities for learning.

HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL

The focus was on physical education AS and A-level and leisure and recreation AVCE. The provision for all sixth form students to take part in physical activity is good. Opportunities are provided, both on and off site, for student to take part in diverse activities such as aerobics, team sports and trampolining. Highly qualified coaches assist teachers with the programme which is well organised.

Physical education

Overall, the quality of provision in physical education is **good**.

Strengths

- A-level results are above average.
- A variety of teaching methods is used and this results in effective learning.
- Students' attitudes are good; they are keen to learn.
- Extra-curricular provision is very good.
- The sixth form course is well led.

Areas for improvement

- Accommodation, particularly indoor practical facilities, is unsatisfactory.
- Ensuring that the content of essays comprehensively relates to the question set.

226. Results at A-level are above the national average. These results were better than the previous year.

227. Inspection evidence shows that students currently in Years 12 and 13 are producing work of a broadly similar standard. Within a wide ability range, most students in Year 13 achieve well, with some lower-attaining students achieving very well. Teachers give marks in A-level grades and percentages so that students are clear about their achievement. In Year 13, students are able to convey their views effectively. For example, when analysing the influence of hosting the Olympics, they were able to identify how international events could be inclusive and benefit international understanding. Conversely, students also understood how culture and ideals, and the attendant moral issues of conflict and propaganda, could influence the promotion of political ideology or give opportunities for displaying economic power. For example, in one Year 13 lesson, with reference to the 2000 Sydney Olympics, students considered the potential conflict over the plight of the Aborigines and how this was resolved. High-attaining students produce written work of good quality; they use correct technical terms and work is accurately structured. They achieve good results in set work even on complex issues like athletes' performance in third world countries and the economics involved in their promotion. Lower-attaining students achieve well because marking gives guidance on analysing what is required for a set

piece of work or an examination question.

228. Students in Year 12 achieve well because they are well focused and have high expectations of the course and confidence in the teaching. They take care to arrange their written work so that it is well organised for revision. This methodical correlation is particularly beneficial for lower-attaining students' confidence in accessing essential elements to the course. For example, good links are made between fitness, body function and the effects of drugs and smoking so students understand the physiological effects of addiction and are able to identify the importance of fitness on health. Students maintain fitness by taking part in the many sporting activities run by teachers as part of the very good extra-curricular sports provision. They also take part in sixth form activities provided in curriculum time. Here a wide range of sporting activities is offered to all sixth form students. A high number of AS and A-level students represent the school in sporting activities and some represent Kent. Most go on to further study and many play for outside clubs.

229. Overall the quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers have high expectations of students. The most effective lessons have good planning and organisation; this gives good pace to lessons, which results in effective learning. Most lessons include a variety of teaching methods; this reinforces learning as well as adding interest. Teachers are particularly adept at questioning to draw out understanding and enforce learning. Teaching is often linked to familiar situations or sports so that students readily relate this to their learning. For example, sports and skills were used in understanding the various uses of muscle fibres to achieve stamina in long distance events and explosive energy in short distance events. Students were able to measure their potential for power output in a lesson, which linked practical performance to theoretical principles. Good use of ICT was made in a lesson where the home advantage was explored. A student used a PowerPoint presentation, which accessed his research and involved other students in decision-making. Marking and assessment are linked to target setting; this enables teachers to identify quickly any underachieving students and, where necessary, mentoring sessions are arranged to redirect and assist students. Lower-attaining students do well because of the individual attention they receive. Evaluation in lessons is generally good. Students did not always do so well in identifying issues in essay titles so that these could be specifically addressed. Conclusions were not always well related back to the essence of the question.

230. Students have a very responsible attitude to their work. They have confidence in their teachers' knowledge. Good relationships enable teachers to tease out and include contributions to discussions from even the most reluctant speakers. Students are prepared to assist one another and share. For example, in one Year 13 lesson the teacher asked each student to concentrate on one aspect and so split the whole task for one lesson. All aspects were researched and delivered to the group so that students understood the global effect of different countries on sport. Students had an appreciation of one another's work, had researched and knew one topic well so good examples could be given and, by sharing the whole, had reduced the time taken to cover the global issues. This demonstrated good teaching but also the good relationships and the degree of co-operation within the group to assist one another's learning. Most students discuss openly and express themselves well.

231. The department is well led and managed. There is a determination, and a commitment, to maintain high standards. This aim is supported by the teachers' careful analysis of examination results for improvement. For example, teachers are aware of the strengths and weaknesses of students' previous performance in the various components in the course and know where improvements might be made. Students are provided with good textbooks but supporting material in the library is insufficient and unsatisfactory. Student access to computers is limited. When computers were used they were used effectively and students learnt well. There was some evidence of use of the Internet but there was more limited use for recording. Greater access would enhance learning opportunities and promote attainment levels. Accommodation, particularly indoor practical facilities mentioned in the previous

report, is unsatisfactory. Ongoing departmental initiatives provide a good basis for sustaining the present level of good attainment and achievement.

Leisure and recreation

Overall, the quality of provision in leisure and recreation is **very good**.

Strengths

- Standards have been consistently high.
- Teaching is very good.
- Students are enthusiastic and committed.
- Use of ICT is very well integrated into the course.

Areas for improvement

- Aim for greater consistency in the quality of written work and its presentation.
- Broaden the base of research activity to take in more first-hand and documentary evidence.

232. Results in the Advanced GNVQ examination in 2001 were well above average, maintaining the general pattern of recent years. Five of the seven students who took the examination gained marks of distinction. Male and female students did equally well. In relation to their performance at GCSE, students did better than expected.

233. The standards of work of current students are above average. Students in Year 13 combined theory with practice in an outdoor adventure activity session on land yachting. Their follow-up analysis and presentations were of a high standard, including very good use of ICT. In general, their evaluations tend to be brief and their sources of reference and information are often based on electronic media rather than first-hand source material. The evidence of the inspection and the school's predictions of students' grades suggest that the high standards will be maintained. Overall, students achieve good standards.

234. Students in Year 12 have made a good start on the course and are achieving good standards: they are adapting to the need to work more independently, to analyse, develop and justify their views. This was well illustrated in a lesson in which students discussed the definition of sport.

235. Teaching and learning are very good. Teachers provide a very good balance of direction and structuring of students' learning and encouraging independence. In the review of the land yachting trip, for example, objectives were made very clear and students were given an organisational framework

within which they could share experiences and consolidate the knowledge and understanding derived from the practical session. On the trip itself, the teacher combined wholehearted participation with very good guidance as to how to apply experience in the context of the course and offered good cues for debriefing with the course provider. Teaching in Year 12 was characterised by a very motivating, interactive approach, very good explanation and the use of strategies to involve and engage students in analysis and discussion. Assessment and marking of work are very good. Students' folders show detailed and constructive comment. Relationships between students and teachers are notably good. The inclusive culture built up in groups enables male and female students to take an equal part in discussion and activities.

236. Students learn very well. In the outdoor lesson, they made very good gains in knowledge and skill, backed with alert, critical interest in the organisation and management of the day. They subsequently broadened their understanding through very good groupwork involving presentation and analysis. Year 13 students are mature and independent learners and those in Year 12 are developing the same qualities. The one area where there is scope for some improvement is in the consistency and quality of presentation of written work. Students make very good use of learning resources, but especially the very good ICT resources.

237. The very good teaching and learning are closely allied to the very good management of the course. Schemes of work are well structured and students are kept fully aware of assessment criteria. Development planning in the subject is reviewed annually and has kept pace with changes and initiatives which affect the curriculum. Staff development has taken in revisions to course specifications and assessment. The subject has a very good record of success and is well placed to maintain this.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA

The focus was on art and design AS and A-level. Music and media studies were sampled.

Provision for music is satisfactory and the level of musical ability within the sixth form is average. Only a very small number of students study music at AS and A-level, making it impossible to make significant statistical comparisons. However, music is increasing in popularity with some students joining the sixth form to study the course. Students in Year 13 can identify musical devices such as suspensions, cadences, sequences and imitation. They can create their own short pieces harmonised with simple chords using first and second inversions. Performance standards are high but knowledge of harmony is less well developed. Compositions generally lack the musicianship normally expected at this stage. Students do not use technical musical vocabulary when they describe music they hear.

Provision for media studies is satisfactory. In the 2001 AS and A-level examinations, students did less well than in most of their other subjects. A reason for this was staffing changes over the past two years. Current standards are higher than past results suggest. Students of a wide range of ability follow the course. Most are making good progress and achieving standards in line with national expectations. Some higher-attaining students have particularly well-researched course work. The quality of teaching observed was good. Management and organisation of the subject area has improved and there are now sufficient qualified and experienced teachers. Appropriate schemes of work are in place and significant investment has been made in new learning resources.

Art and design

Overall, the quality of provision in art and design is **unsatisfactory**.

Strengths

- Some good independent learning skills as seen in sketchbooks and work journals.
- Slightly increased in-take into Year 12 including some boys who have progressed from Year 11.

Areas for improvement

- Standards in both practical and written responses.
- Quality of teaching and learning, to inspire, challenge, motivate and encourage students.
- Recruit larger numbers into Year 12 and retain viable numbers for A-level.

238. Recruitment on to the A-level course is very low. Only 15 students have completed a two-year course in the last four years. Of these, three were ungraded and three gained either A or B grades. In 2000 six students entered the examination and significantly underachieved compared to their performance in their other subjects. The results in 2001 were better but numbers were small. The three students entered gained A and C grades, showing at least satisfactory achievement relative to their starting points. The numbers entered are too small to make comparisons with national data but have now increased slightly.

239. Most students enter the course with above average GCSE results. Results in AS examinations in 2001 show satisfactory achievement overall. Those going on to take the second year, advanced, course are not however making enough progress. Their achievements, reflected in their current work and the samples of work provided by the school, do not demonstrate sufficiently high levels of intellectual curiosity, investigation and experimentation. Achievement is therefore unsatisfactory. Much of the work that students produce lacks the technical skill and intellectual depth required at this advanced level. The teaching does not challenge and make enough demands of students who clearly have the prior experience and achievements to attain high standards. They listen and absorb what they are told but few give coherent and well-argued responses to questions or extend and develop their technical and creative mark-making to an appropriate standard. Some lessons each week are taught outside the art studios so access to books and other specialist materials are limited. Very little use is made of ICT other than for research.

240. In Year 12, standards are very variable and while some work shows increasing depth and valid references to artists' work some work shows research to be superficial. The recent changes to the syllabus, that place greater emphasis on written and contextual studies, have not been fully taken on board by teachers or students. A greater range of teaching and learning styles is needed to ensure students demonstrate higher levels of intellectual enquiry in their written, oral and practical work.

241. Some of the teaching seen during the inspection was sound but the impact of teaching over the longer term is unsatisfactory. Teachers have specialist subject knowledge and expertise but what they plan and the quality of their interactions with students does not inspire and challenge them. Expectations of both the standard and amount of work produced are not high enough and on-going assessments are not properly recorded and used to inform and plan the next stages of learning. As a consequence, students are confused by conflicting messages received from both teachers. Lessons were not well structured. The pace was too slow and insufficient time was given at the end of the lesson to review the learning in relation to past and future work.

242. Leadership and management are unsatisfactory. Strategic management of the subject, to raise standards in Years 7 to 11, has had limited impact so far although numbers of boys progressing on to advanced courses have slightly increased. Standards in AS and A-level courses are not consistently high enough and retention on A-level courses remains low. The accommodation and the quality and

range of books, and other resources are inadequate and are a contributing factor in the overall unsatisfactory provision. There was insufficient information on the provision for art and design in the previous report to comment on improvement.

HUMANITIES

The focus was on geography, history, sociology and psychology at AS and A-level. Work in government and politics was sampled. Provision in government and politics is satisfactory and the school has worked hard to minimise the impact of recent staffing difficulties. Both in discussions and lessons, Year 12 students understood key political terms and concepts relating to political parties, elections and pressure groups, and used them well. They made good progress in the sample lesson led by a knowledgeable teacher with good resources. Students reviewed their performance in recent internal examinations, and used the best answers as models to raise their own standards for the forthcoming AS-level examinations.

The provision for religious education for all sixth form students is unsatisfactory. There is no coherent planned provision for students as recommended by the local Agreed Syllabus and the school does not meet statutory requirements.

Geography

Overall, the quality of provision in geography is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching, which is having a positive impact on standards.
- Students' positive attitudes and enthusiasm.
- Fieldwork opportunities abroad which support learning.
- Committed independent student research.

Areas for improvement

- Focus on AS-level examination requirements in order to improve results.
- Students' skills of critical analysis and evaluation are not as well developed as other skills and understanding.

243. Standards at A-level are in line with national results with a significant proportion of students gaining the highest grades. The AS-level results were not as good and were below the national results,

reflecting staffing problems and staff unfamiliarity with the new examination format. In relation to their performance at GCSE, students did as well as expected.

244. Lesson observation and scrutiny of students' work suggest that standards are improving and that results will be higher in 2002. Overall, students are now achieving well in Years 12 and 13. In both physical and human geography, students show a secure knowledge and a developing understanding of complex issues like fluvial geography and globalisation. The standards of independent research on geographical phenomena like the Sydney Hailstorm of 1999 were of a high quality and illustrate good use of ICT to find key information and provide appropriate visualisation for projects. A few students are still having trouble with the higher levels of synthesis and analysis, which advanced studies demand. Students show commendable skills in collecting information from a wide range of sources, particularly the Internet, and can produce sound analysis from the data. Good map work was evident in a number of pieces of work and there was evidence of accurate statistical interpretation. Fieldwork exercises were of a good standard.

245. The quality of teaching and learning observed was good. In lessons, all sixth form teachers spoke authoritatively about the subject and outlined tasks for students with clarity. Students were clear about the purpose of the lesson and knew how long activities should take. Teachers' comments on written work indicated clear judgements were being made about students' learning. Teachers need to continually refine their teaching and learning style to ensure that the advanced needs of sixth form students are always met, particularly in the higher order skills of analysis and synthesis. Students took on group and paired work co-operatively. In discussions relating to their work, Year 13 students were appreciative of their teaching and showed maturity in understanding their own learning patterns. They were disappointed by the AS performance but felt that they were now better equipped to do justice to the A-level examination in 2002. Students listen well and contribute thoughtfully to lessons. When asked to give presentations they spoke convincingly about the results of their investigations and effectively explained their research to the fellow students. The field trip to Italy to study volcanoes and Italian human geography benefited all students.

246. The subject is well led and managed and satisfactory progress has been made since the last inspection. Limited use of ICT is made through student project work. Students use the department's own book stock for research and make some limited use of the library. They understand the targets they should be aiming for and their performance is well monitored by staff. Teachers work well together and the department has the capacity to continue to improve.

History

Overall, the quality of provision in history is **just satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Students' positive attitudes which enable them to learn effectively in class and independently.
- A good range of resources.
- Committed teachers who provide individual support for students.

Areas for improvement

- Standards at AS and A-level.
- Greater consistency in teaching.
- Consistent review and monitoring of students' work and target setting.

247. Results in A-level history have dropped in the last two years. Results in 2001 were below national averages with very few students gaining the highest grades. This was a slight improvement on the 2000 results. Students performed less well in A-level history than in many other subjects. Staffing difficulties and changes to syllabus over the last three years have played a part in this.

248. The 2001 AS-level results gained by Year 12 students were below those expected. The highest grade was B, and the average grade a D. The document study on Nazi Germany posed problems for students as they were faced with framing responses to documentary and visual evidence seen for the first time under test conditions and linking this to their own knowledge and understanding. They had not been sufficiently prepared for this in the trial papers. Grades for this paper were some three grades below that reached in the other two components. This led to underachievement.

249. Lesson observation and scrutiny of work support the view that students are now achieving satisfactorily, particularly in areas where they are dealing with new material and periods. Twentieth century work, which is revisiting material relating to that covered in Years 9 to 11 is still weaker. Some students, including girls, join the sixth form from other schools, all with sound grades in history GCSE. Those who studied different topics for GCSE absorb key facts and arguments well. Good practice in reviewing standards reached in trial examinations and attempting to add marks to raise attainment was seen in one lesson, where those students who wanted to improve their performance took copious notes, using as models the best answers from the group. Higher-attaining students are beginning to question assumptions by Year 13. They read widely to consider the views both of the French and other European nations over the two centuries since Napoleon came to power, and make sound comparisons across centuries and civilisations.

250. The strengths and weaknesses within the range of work seen, and in the commitment of students reflect the fact that some students lack challenge and inspiration whilst others need careful examination practice and support to achieve the higher grades. There has been a tendency to teach to the middle of the group rather than match tasks fully to students' individual learning needs.

251. The quality of teaching and learning is now satisfactory, after some difficulties caused by staff changes in the last two years. Appropriate steps have been taken to overcome gaps in learning for those students who took AS-level in 2001, by revisiting topics in Year 13, and concentrating on examination techniques. In the best lessons, independent learning and research were supported by good planning and this enabled students to present a variety of views. Teachers provided opportunities for students to add different arguments and evidence, helping them to improve their draft essay responses. In a lesson about the contribution of Lenin, Trotsky and the workers to the success of the October Revolution, students had been guided to research individual viewpoints, considering the events leading to the Revolution as well as its conduct. They articulated their views, backed up by reading and quotations which the others noted. From this whole group activity, students could structure an individual essay response in which higher-attainers had the opportunity to present their own view, backed up by appropriate detail, contrasting views over time as well as those of contemporaries.

252. In some lessons, teaching relied on the teacher as the source of authority, and learning consisted of passive listening with often uncoordinated notes taken from a narrative. This provided students with insufficient opportunities for active enquiry. On some occasions good student questions were not acknowledged as interesting nor presented to the group, which left original thinkers regarding their ideas as unimportant or wrong.

253. Target setting and regular review of students work are still underdeveloped. The monitoring of student files is not sufficiently structured to meet the needs of those students who struggle to organise their own learning. Relationships between staff and students are good. Teachers offer good individual

support including extra reading from the wide range of resources in the department. Resources in the library are limited. Students are encouraged to attend lectures on the topics and techniques required for the A-level syllabus, and many plan to study history at university.

254. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. AS and A-level teaching is shared between most of the department, pairing staff with complementary skills. Resources are good, books in the department stock provide a wealth of background and detailed reading.

255. Although improvement since the last inspection has been unsatisfactory overall, efforts are being made to adapt the syllabus to the students' perceived strengths and make up for instability in the recent past. The department has the capacity to make improvements, dependent upon more effective monitoring of performance and the elimination of current inconsistencies in teaching.

Sociology

Overall, the quality of provision in sociology is **good**.

Strengths

- Good teaching leads to student success in examinations.
- Good relationships with students.
- Detailed marking enables students' self-assessment.

Areas for improvement

- Extend the good practice seen in teaching so that all students play an active role in their learning, to develop confidence with aspects of the course.

256. In the AS examination for 2001, the current Year 13 students met their target grades overall and have a solid base upon which to build their A-level studies. Students are making good progress in sociology over the two years, given their starting points and their predicted grades. The department has been affected by the long term illness and subsequent departure of one member of staff in the middle of this inaugural sociology course, making the continued progress and examination results all the more commendable.

257. Overall, students achieve well from a base point of limited knowledge and understanding of the subject when they enter the sixth form. Standards of work of current students are in line with national expectations. Year 13 students show sound knowledge and understanding. In an introductory lesson to the big question of how to define social class, they were able to point to the possible inadequacy of official categories and statistics as compiled by the office of the Registrar General. Some students brought their knowledge of significant sociological perspectives to bear in analysis of why these

categories might have been compiled as they are. They identified the complications that arise both in the compiling of statistics, and in their analysis by sociologists. In their research studies they showed a knowledge of key issues in research methodology, for example the considerations taken into account in preparation for a research questionnaire, and how the chosen form of open questions would best suit the purpose. The neat files of the sample of work from this group indicated confident, independent learners putting theory into the practice of field research. They have a sound grasp of major theoretical perspectives and significant case studies.

258. Although only a relatively short time into their course, students in Year 12 showed they were making a sound start. With reference to case studies already well known to them they could discuss key issues in the methodology of social research, such as the unreliability of data, and the related matter of taking into account the provenance of the research when analysing its significance. In discussion, they showed knowledge of major perspectives and could mention significant research, for example those they had come across in their study of the family.

259. The quality of teaching and learning is good. In the lessons observed it varied between satisfactory and very good. It was very good in a lesson observed in Year 12 when the teacher structured and focused the lesson around clear ideas and objectives. A very brisk pace was adopted and challenging questions asked. The teacher asked for past learning of, for example, Marxist and functionalist perspectives, to be used to analyse the ideas of the 'new vocationalism'. The students' responses reflected their past learning, the higher-attaining among them notably able to draw on it and apply to this new situation. The impact of teaching can be seen in the well-informed and organised work in the students' files in Year 13. When teaching was only satisfactory, the students were less involved in their learning, and therefore less well placed to develop their critical faculties and bring past knowledge to bear on their learning. There were no noticeable differences in standards attained by boys and girls, or by students of minority ethnic origin.

260. The department is well led. The head of department shows good understanding of the examination demands of the subject. As a result, the guidance for students is very clear and provides a basis for understanding the demands of the course. The students' files in Year 13 record a consistent approach to planning for the syllabus requirements and the assessment needs of the students. Detailed marking indicates what students need to do to improve their work and how they are progressing towards targets. The students use the Internet and the library's recent text additions to support their independent research projects.

261. Good subject knowledge and enthusiasm for teaching are department strengths. The students show a sound knowledge of key research and sociological perspectives. Students' interest and motivation make a big contribution. The students benefit from good relationships with teachers and they enjoy the teaching when it allows them to think for themselves and develop their critical thinking.

Psychology

Overall, the quality of provision in psychology is **good**.

Strengths

- Above average standards at A-level.
- The good quality of teaching and students' very good attitudes contribute to students making good progress.
- Very good classroom relationships and high involvement of students in learning has a considerable impact on the rate at which they learn.

- The subject is well led and managed with a clear educational direction.

Areas for improvement

- Ensure that the learning needs of gifted and higher-attaining students are sufficiently considered both in lessons and schemes of work.

262. Most students enter this course, taught only in Years 12 and 13, with prior attainment that is about average. Examination results over the last three years have been consistently above national averages. All students entered during this period have gained grades in the A to E range and achieved at least their predicted grades. The results of boys and girls differ but only in line with the situation found nationally.

263. The scrutiny of students' work broadly confirms the picture presented by the examination results, although Year 12 students are making more substantial progress and their achievement is higher than was the case for Year 13 at the same stage of the AS-level course last year. All students, in both Years 12 and 13, have a good grasp of basic psychological terminology, empirical methods and concepts and can apply them well, orally and in writing. Overall, students' achievement is good.

264. Year 12 students are developing understanding of Piaget's principles and, by analysing and working through the stages outlined in his model, they quickly increase their understanding of the cognitive, social and personal development of children. In Year 13, students grappled with the concept of stress and, through brainstorming, gathered a rich vocabulary that they used in their exploration of the Yerkes-Dodson law. They were also clearly aware of the physiological dimension of stress-related activity as they considered the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS).

265. Students' attitudes, to the subject and to their work, are very good. They come to lessons ready to work and show high commitment to their learning and to being diligent and successful students. Relationships, between students and with their teachers, are very good: considerable mutual respect is shown. Boys and girls work well together. Differences of view or perspective on a topic are challenged, usually supported by reason or evidence. Most students support their work with carefully structured notes that are stored in well-organised folders. The teachers' excellent use of the overhead projector and whiteboard ensure that key concepts and ideas, as well as vocabulary, are noted and used by students for accurate reference in note making.

266. The overall quality of the teaching and learning is good: in one-fifth of the lessons it was very good. Teachers' strong subject knowledge enabled lesson material to be well-planned. A variety of methods were deployed to provide challenge, and to enable students to be active participants in learning, make good progress and develop good levels of knowledge and understanding. For instance, in a Year 13 lesson, the brisk start, brainstorming ideas on stress, enabled all to participate and draw on previous learning. Students used questions to clarify as well as explore their ideas. The follow-up activities built on this important start to the lesson and ensured high achievement when students wrote their own definitions of stress as well as exploring the GAS model.

267. Teachers have very high expectations of their students and teaching is constantly punctuated with increased levels of challenge, for the whole group as well as to pairs or trios undertaking a group activity. However, on occasions, in the interests of maintaining the pace of learning, some higher-attaining students are given answers that, with further probing questions, could have been elicited from them.

268. Learning is always well supported by well-defined tasks, a range of resources, the excellent use of whiteboard and overhead projector as well as well-structured handouts. The pace and rate of

learning rarely slows as time, students and resources are well managed. Homework tasks are demanding, extend learning and ensure that knowledge and understanding are secure. The work is regularly marked, with detailed comment, references and targets for improvement. Students value this approach and the oral and written comments that enable subsequent tasks and projects to show improvement. The outcomes of a structured approach to assessment are well used to inform curriculum review and development.

269. The curriculum is of good quality, taking account of the learning needs of most students. It includes the effective use of ICT and a structured approach to the further development of literacy and numeracy.

270. The subject is well led and managed. Accommodation is good and is well used to reflect learning in the subject and resources are sufficient to ensure a range of materials and technologies are available. The department has sufficient staff for the current level of provision but learning has been affected by illness of teachers. Current arrangements, to cover for an absent colleague, are satisfactory. The students are well supported by the head of department's guidance and commitment to reviewing and clarifying work undertaken in private study periods. This is an increasingly popular subject with students and the department provides a good quality service to all learners.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

The focus was on English and A-level German. French and business languages were sampled. In French, examination results at A-level in 2001 were in line with national expectations. In the lesson observed teaching and learning were good. The teacher conducted the lesson entirely in French to the great benefit of students' oral fluency and listening comprehension. Some students had a good knowledge of aspects of French grammar and a good command of vocabulary relating to the topic of the resistance in occupied France during the Second World War. Students made satisfactory progress in listening, speaking and reading. A scrutiny of students' course work revealed good standards in written work.

The Year 12 business Spanish lesson observed was satisfactory. The teacher conducted the lesson entirely in Spanish and encouraged the students to speak most of the time in Spanish as well. The lesson had a good pace and consisted of an interesting variety of activities to practise asking and giving directions in town. There were also good opportunities for independent learning. Good use was made of the computer to present and practice vocabulary and structures. All students could give simple directions in Spanish, but only a few could use complete sentences without making mistakes. Students' work indicates a satisfactory rate of progress.

In a Year 12 business Italian lesson, the teacher spoke in Italian for most of the time which greatly enhanced students' listening skills. The teacher made excellent use of visual resources to present and practise the language. The students worked well as a whole group, individually and in pairs to practise giving directions in town. The teacher knows the class well and uses her knowledge to challenge and motivate all students including the gifted and talented. Overall the teaching and learning were good. Students are making good progress. On the day of the lesson observation, four of the ten members of the group were absent. Regular absence is a problem for this class.

In a Year 12 business French lesson, teaching and learning were good. The pace of the lesson was brisk and there were many varied activities to motivate students to produce spoken French. Good use was made of written prompts to cue oral work. Students work well individually, in pairs and as a whole group. Students could take part in simple dialogues asking for and giving directions in town. Their

attitudes were good.

English

Overall, the quality of provision in English is **very good**.

Strengths

- High standards, reflected in good AS and A-level results.
- The quality of writing and research, particularly by higher-attaining students.
- Very good quality teaching leads to effective learning.
- Students are committed to their studies and enjoy the courses.
- Leadership and management are good.

Areas for improvement

- Eliminate inconsistencies in marking and ensure all students are given guidance on how to improve.

271. The department offers AS and A-level courses. Of the 46 students who followed the AS course last year, 34 have continued into Year 13. The department accepts between 10 and 15 per cent of students each year from other schools.

272. All the students, who entered the English literature A-level examination in 2001, passed. Although the percentage of A and B grade passes fell slightly from the previous year, the percentage was well above the national average. While overall performance has fallen over the past four years, it remains above the national average. Attainment in class is well above the national average and more closely reflects the very good AS results the Year 12 students achieved in 2001. Both male and female students make good progress. Samples of work also indicate well above average attainment.

273. Speaking and listening skills are well above national expectations. Students respond thoughtfully and perceptively. Views are clearly expressed and cogently argued. For example, in one class students discussed the meaning of the title 'A Passage to India', building upon the collective understanding of the group as a whole. Students are confident and fluent readers. For example, in another class, students took turns to read Walt Whitman's poem 'A Passage to India'. Most students read confidently and with a clear understanding.

274. The gap between the most able and the average attaining students is most apparent in the quality of writing. Most students have secure basic skills. They write accurately and structure their work appropriately. Most higher-attaining students research thoroughly and write well-argued essays with close reference to the text and appropriate use of quotations. Some lower-attaining students require much more help with structuring an argument and substantiating by reference to the text. Not all written work is well presented but many students word-process their assignments effectively.

275. The quality of teaching and learning is always good and sometimes excellent. Teachers have a very good knowledge and understanding of the subject, form positive relationships and plan lessons appropriately. When these qualities combine with high expectations, learning is very effective. For example in a challenging lesson, the teacher led a discussion in which students explored Elizabeth Barrett-Browning's criticism of Tennyson's style of poetry within the social context of the period. Building upon this, students were able to consider Robert Browning's poem, 'Porphyria's Lover' in the context of changing values in Victorian society. The quality of marking is variable. Although comments are generally constructive, marking is often more detailed for higher-attaining students whilst lower-

attaining students require more guidance.

276. Students' positive attitudes enhance their learning. They enjoy the English course. Students joining from other schools have been made welcome and are fully integrated into classes. Most students are well prepared for lessons. Homework is, for the most part, conscientiously completed. Students appreciate their teachers whom they find very supportive. They are given regular evaluations of their attainment and progress and are clear as to their standards. Sixth formers are currently rehearsing for a performance of 'Pygmalion'.

277. Post-16 English is well managed. The courses are well organised and the mixed ability groups are well balanced. An outline scheme of work ensures the coherent delivery of the curriculum and a development plan outlines the strategic development of post-16 courses. There are established entry qualifications for advanced level study. Learning resources are sufficient to deliver the curriculum although students are required to buy some of the texts. Some appropriate texts are available in the sixth form library, although most students use the Internet for their research work. There has been satisfactory improvement since the last report.

German

Overall, the quality of provision in German is **satisfactory**.

Strengths

- Teachers' subject knowledge and linguistic skills are very good.
- Resources are very good.
- Relationships are good

Areas for improvement

- Raise standards of attainment in examinations.
- Develop students' oral confidence and grammatical awareness, particularly through consistent use of German in lessons.
- Develop students' independent learning.

278. It is not possible to make national comparisons about A-level results since the number of students opting for German over the last four years has been very small. Since 1996, most students have passed A-level but few have attained the higher grades. The results in AS-level in 2001 were below the school's predictions.

279. Numbers have now increased. Standards in lessons are variable but overall average. In both Year 12 and Year 13 there is a wide range of ability. The high-attainers can talk fluently about a range of topics and give opinions about contemporary issues and can use more complex structures and subordinate clauses with confidence. Lower-attainers experience difficulty with simple grammatical patterns and have gaps in basic vocabulary. Pronunciation and intonation are generally good. Higher-attainers have good reading comprehension skills. They are able to understand the gist and extract details from a wide range of texts. Some students, however, lack the vocabulary to tackle such tasks with success. Students produce a variety of written work ranging from vocabulary lists, grammar notes and exercises to extended essays, assignments and presentations on a range of topics. Higher-attainers are accurate and use a range of structures with appropriate general and specialist vocabulary and expressions. Some students do not do enough independent work at home, which limits their progress. All students achieve satisfactorily and the highest-attainers make good progress in lessons. They quickly learn new vocabulary and structures. They make good use of ICT to enhance their learning.

280. The quality of teaching and learning is generally satisfactory and good in some lessons. Teachers' subject knowledge and linguistic skills are very good. They prepare lessons well and the lesson aims are clear. Teachers make good use of recorded material using individual cassette recorders. The use of German is not, however, consistent which undermines the importance of the language as the everyday means of communication. The activities, contemporary topics and interesting materials motivate students. Teachers praise students for their efforts and correct mistakes constructively.

281. Relationships are good. Students are serious, attentive and willing in lessons. They ask questions for clarification and seek help if they do not understand. The leadership of the subject is satisfactory. The head of department observes the other German teachers in the classroom and gives feedback. The resources are very good. The library contains some German dictionaries and reference works as well as a selection of literary texts. It is occasionally used by students for independent research. The department also benefits from the services of a German assistant which develops students' oral fluency, as also does the exchange with a German school. Progress since the last report is satisfactory.