

# INSPECTION REPORT

**NOWER HILL HIGH SCHOOL**

Pinner

LEA area: Harrow

Unique reference number: 102238

Headteacher: Mr Howard Freed

Reporting inspector: Dr Barbara Hilton  
3228

Dates of inspection: 8 - 12 October 2001

Inspection number: 189273

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school:	Comprehensive
School category:	Community
Age range of students:	12 to 16
Gender of students:	Mixed
School address:	George V Avenue Pinner Middlesex
Postcode:	HA5 5RP
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr Peter Daffon
Date of previous inspection:	29 September 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
3228	Barbara Hilton	Registered inspector		The school's results and students' achievement How well are students taught? How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students? How well is the school led and managed? Key Stage 4
9561	Husain Akhtar	Lay inspector		Students' attitudes, values and personal development How well does the school care for its students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
11720	Philip Winch	Team inspector	English	
19925	Margaret Price	Team inspector	Mathematics	
1779	David Leonard	Team inspector	Science	
10288	John Richards	Team inspector	Art Information and communication technology	
8076	Terence Bendall	Team inspector	Design and technology	
12118	Allan Paver	Team inspector	Geography	Staffing, accommodation and learning resources
1795	Joyce Sanderson	Team inspector	History	English as an additional language
27240	William Hooper	Team inspector	Latin Classical studies	
11838	Derek Cronin	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	
31660	Marianne Young	Team inspector	Music, Drama	
14446	Barry Simmons	Team inspector	Physical education	
4773	Peter Gilliat	Team inspector	Religious education	Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development
27411	Heather Butensky	Team inspector		Special educational needs

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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Nower Hill High School is a popular 12-16 comprehensive school, which, with 1204 students, is larger than most. The school provides for students across the ability range; overall attainment on entry is average. The proportions of students with special educational needs and with Statements of Special Educational Needs are average. Most of the students with higher levels of need have dyslexia, behavioural difficulties or sensory impairments. About 50 per cent of students are from ethnic minority backgrounds, which is more than in most schools and more than at the time of the last inspection. They reflect the diversity and richness of local communities; the largest single group, at about 19 per cent, is of Indian background. While many students are bilingual, only three per cent are starting to learn English. The most frequently spoken home languages (other than English) are Gujarati, Punjabi, Tamil and Arabic. A few students (14) are refugees, mostly from Somalia. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals, at eight per cent, is below average. The school is in a moderately prosperous area, with pockets of disadvantage. Turn-over of staff has been high, recently. The school has achieved numerous awards: for achievement, arts education, careers education and it is a Beacon school.

### **HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS**

Nower Hill High School is a good school, very ably led and managed by the headteacher, who is well supported by senior managers and governors. Good teaching and students' very good attitudes enable them to achieve well: results at the end of Year 9 and GCSE are well above average. Value for money is good.

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

- Results of National Curriculum tests and for GCSE are well above average.
- Good teaching promotes high standards overall, and notably so in English, mathematics, art, drama and music.
- Students are friendly, enthusiastic and keen to learn.
- Staff have strong commitment to students: through lessons and many extra-curricular activities they support students' learning and personal development very effectively.
- The curriculum is well suited to students' needs and benefits from very good links with local schools and colleges, which enrich opportunities and help students to progress.
- Leadership by the headteacher is a strength, and he is very capably supported by senior managers and the well-informed and rigorous governing body.

#### **What could be improved**

- Progress in science in Years 8 and 9, by strengthening the monitoring and support for teachers.
- Students' information and communication technology skills, through increasing opportunities for them to use computers in all subjects in Years 10 and 11.
- Students' understanding of what they need to do to improve, by making fuller use of assessment information and tracking their progress.
- Spiritual development, through providing religious education for all in Years 10 and 11, more opportunities for reflection in lessons and collective worship.

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

### **HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION**

Since the last inspection, the school has made satisfactory progress: results have improved in line with the national trend. Significant improvement has been made in planning to meet the needs of all students in lessons and teaching is much better now. Arrangements have been introduced which strengthen the monitoring of teaching and the use of assessment to raise standards; the school has plans to further develop these areas. Better use is made of assessment to predict and set targets for results overall; more work is needed to use information for the benefit of individual students. Weaknesses, reported at the last inspection, remain in spiritual development and opportunities for worship. The financial and management difficulties of three years ago have been successfully overcome with the appointment of the new headteacher, about 18 months ago. The good features of management reported at the last inspection have been built upon. The school is well placed to improve further; leadership is a strength and management is effective.

## STANDARDS

The table shows the standards achieved by students at the end of Year 11 based on average point scores in GCSE examinations.

Performance in:	compared with				<b>Key</b>  well above average    A above average        B average                C below average        D well below average   E
	all schools			similar schools	
	1998	1999	2000	2000	
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A	

By the end of Year 9, students achieve well above average results in National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science, relative both to all schools nationally and to similar schools. This represents very good progress, relative to their levels of attainment on entry in Year 8, which are average, overall. Results in mathematics are a little better than in English and science. Literacy and numeracy standards are good. GCSE results are well above average, relative both to all schools and to similar schools. Students of all abilities achieve well. Progress from the end of Year 9 up to GCSE is very good. GCSE results in 2001 were similar to those in 2000 and are improving in line with the national trend. Results in English, art and, usually, in mathematics are well above average. They are above average in sciences and most other subjects, except for information and communication technology where they have fluctuated and in 2001 were below average. Girls achieve higher results than boys at GCSE, though the results of both are well above the national average. Students of Pakistani and Indian background do particularly well.

Attainment in lessons is above average, overall. Students with special educational needs, and those learning to speak English, progress well and keep up with others in their classes. In a few subjects, achievement is not as good as generally in the school, particularly in Years 10 and 11 in information and communication technology and, in Years 8 and 9, in science. Achievement is high in English, mathematics, art, drama and music.

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Very good: students generally participate well in lessons and very well in extra-curricular activities.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Good, overall. Movement in circulation areas is not always careful, but generally orderly.
Personal development and relationships	Students develop commitment to their work and strong loyalty to the school. Relationships among all groups are very good. Students are happy and friendly.
Attendance	Satisfactory.

Students' very good attitudes help them to learn well and succeed in examinations.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of students:	Years 8 – 9	Years 10 – 11
Quality of teaching	good	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.*

Teaching is good in most subjects and in the school overall. Learning follows a similar pattern. In music, drama (in Years 10 and 11) and much of English and art, teaching is very good. It is good in mathematics and in science (Years 10 and 11), although in Years 8 and 9 science teaching is too frequently unsatisfactory. Lessons in information and communication technology are well taught but



teachers in most other subjects do not have enough access to computers to use them regularly and to promote students' independent learning. Literacy is well taught in English and throughout the school. Students starting to learn English progress well. Teachers adapt work effectively to help students of all abilities to learn and make progress, including those with special educational needs, who keep up well in their classes. Students' very good attitudes help them to do well and match teachers' expectations. They learn systematically as a result of teachers' good planning and make effective use of individual and group work, which are well managed by teachers. They learn numeracy in well-organised mathematics lessons and as the need arises in other subjects: they cope well, on the whole. Marking gives students a good indication of how well they are doing but not all have the benefit of targets to help them focus on raising standards further. Homework is regularly set and used sensibly, on the whole.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	A broad range of subjects is provided throughout, but requirements are not met in Years 10 and 11 in information and communication technology and religious education. Opportunities are enhanced by an unusually strong extra-curricular programme.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Students are supported well in small groups and in subject lessons. Parents are closely involved in their children's progress.
Provision for students with English as an additional language	Students' needs are carefully assessed and specialist teaching enables them to make good progress.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural, development	Good overall, with strengths in social and cultural development, though more opportunities should be provided for deepening spiritual awareness and for collective worship, which is a requirement. Staff are good role models.
How well the school cares for its students	Pastoral care is well organised. Arrangements for supporting students' progress, including the use of assessment, are satisfactory.

The school works effectively with parents, who have high expectations of their children and of the school. Subjects provided include Latin and classical civilisation and, for older students, separate sciences as well as double award science (for GCSE). Subject choice for GCSE is good. More able students can take GCSE examinations in mathematics and classics one year early. Participation is good in the unusually wide range of extra-curricular activities. Personal, social and health education covers requirements in health and sex education and drugs awareness, but is not well documented. Students receive good general guidance on their progress but in most subjects this needs to be better related to national expectations. Revision programmes help them prepare for examinations. Careers education is well organised, with good involvement of local employers. Partnership with local schools and colleges is a strength. Most students, 90 per cent, continue in education, post-16.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher leads very effectively with clarity and vision. The school is well managed with good teamwork among senior managers.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are very supportive. Their commitment and hard work have supported the school in overcoming difficulties faced a few years ago. Requirements are met, except in Years 10 and 11 for information and communication technology and religious education, and for collective worship.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Evaluation is effectively used to raise standards.
The strategic use of	Very good. The school has overcome resourcing difficulties and

resources	prioritises expenditure well.
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Leadership and planning help to raise standards in most subjects but weaknesses in science have affected the quality of teaching, in Years 8 and 9 especially. The school has taken steps to strengthen this. The match of staffing to the requirements of the curriculum is generally good, although in science the turn-over of teachers, and in religious education the use of non-specialists, detract from the generally good teaching. The Gristwood Centre provides excellent accommodation for the expressive arts. Several rooms (in food technology and science) need refurbishment. Learning resources are adequate. Substantial investment in computers is strengthening provision in information and communication technology. The library is well stocked and welcoming. Governors have a keen sense of best value.

## **PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL**

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children like the school.</li> <li>• Expectations are high.</li> <li>• The school is helping their children to become mature and responsible.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The amount of homework.</li> <li>• The information they receive on their children's progress.</li> <li>• They feel the school does not work closely with them.</li> </ul>

Parents have high expectations and overall are satisfied with the school. The inspectors agree with their favourable views. Inspectors found homework regularly used, though variable amounts are set. Reports on students' progress are satisfactory. The information which parents receive on the school is good but that on the curriculum and their children's progress could be more specific. Some parents expressed concern about extra-curricular activities but inspectors found the programme to be very good and to generate much participation by students.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

### **HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?**

#### **The school's results and students' achievements**

##### *Standards overall*

1. The attainment of students on entry in Year 8 is average. Few students have high or very low attainment at this stage. By the end of Year 9, students achieve well above average in National Curriculum tests in English, mathematics and science, relative both to all schools nationally and to similar schools. Results in mathematics are a little better than in English and science. Boys and girls do equally well, overall.
2. Results of the General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) are well above average, relative both to the national average and to similar schools. Until recently, results, while very good for five subjects at the higher grades (A\*-C), have been below average across the full range of grades (both for five subjects and for one subject). In 2001, however, results improved markedly across the full range of grades: nearly all students who entered (99 per cent) achieved a GCSE certificate. Over ten per cent of candidates achieved ten or more GCSE grades in the range A\*-B.
3. Results, both at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE, represent very good achievement (relative to attainment on entry and at the end of Year 9, respectively). Girls obtain higher results than boys at GCSE, though the results of each are much better than for girls or boys nationally. Pakistani and Indian students achieve very well in examinations; the results of white students are below the average of other groups. Results are better than at the last inspection and are improving in line with the national trend. The school makes effective use of targets to improve results, for the school as a whole and in individual subjects. The overall targets are challenging: they exceed predictions, based on standards tests taken by students in Year 8, and usually the targets themselves are exceeded. A high proportion (90 per cent) continue in education post-16.
4. Standards in lessons were above average, overall, and a little better in Years 10 and 11 than lower down the school, reflecting students' progress. Students with special educational needs progress in line with the rest: in most years they gain graded GCSE results, with a good proportion of higher (A\*-C) grades. Students who are learning to speak English, in addition to their home language, receive specialist help and also do well.

##### *Standards in English, mathematics and science*

5. GCSE results in English are well above the national average, both in language and literature. Girls do better than boys, as nationally. Results represent very good progress from the end of Year 9. Standards seen in the inspection were well above expectations. Students speak fluently, giving good reasons for their views. Listening skills are highly developed. Writing develops well through the school. In Years 8 and 9, support for literacy in English lessons is very good. Students learn to write accurately and in a variety of forms. Reading develops well and the more able read challenging and varied literature. Students search for implicit meaning and appreciate how language is used to convey character - as in the plays of Shakespeare. A good start has been made in co-ordinating literacy across the curriculum, and in most subjects teachers place good emphasis on reading and writing.
6. In recent years, GCSE results in mathematics have been above, and usually well above, national averages. More able students have the opportunity to take the examination at the end of Year 10. Results represent good progress from standards reached at the end of Year 9. Standards seen during the inspection were above average, though not quite as high as results might suggest. Students are helped to achieve good results in formal assessments through comprehensive revision programmes. Students' performance in GCSE mathematics is better than in most of their other subjects, including English and science. Boys and girls achieve equally well. Standards of numeracy are good, supported by work done in mathematics in Years 8 and 9. In other subjects, teachers help students with numbers and mathematical concepts as the need arises and generally students cope effectively - as observed in geography, science and design and technology, although opportunities to reinforce ideas about space and enlargement were missed in art.
7. While the proportion of high grades (A\*-C) achieved across science subjects is well above the national average, results overall are not as good as in English and mathematics. Results in

double-award combined science (taken by the great majority of students) are about average: they do better in their other subjects. However, about one-fifth of the year group take separate sciences (biology, chemistry and physics), in which performance is above average. Results represent good progress from the standards achieved at the end of Year 9. Standards in lessons seen in Years 10 and 11 are in line with recent results. However, standards in lessons lower down the school are not as good. In lessons and work seen in Year 8 and 9 progress was only just satisfactory, affected by weaknesses in teaching because teachers new to the school find it hard to cope with mixed ability classes and do not receive enough subject support.

### *Standards in other subjects*

8. The school has strengths in creative and expressive arts subjects. Students achieve well in art, drama and music. In lessons seen, standards were high in art (sketchbooks are of very good quality, for example) and, by the time they are in Year 11, students are working at above-average standards in drama and music (with strengths in musical performance). Results are consistently well above average in art, a little better than average in drama and about average in music, in which standards are improving, under very good leadership. Students progress well in dance, which is provided as an activity within physical education, though not as an examination subject. Results in physical education, a popular subject at GCSE, are consistently above average and in 2001 were well above recent national averages. Individual students achieve success in local and regional events in a good range of sports.
9. Overall achievement across design and technology is good: GCSE results are above average, considering the subjects as a whole. However, variation is marked across the different aspects of technology. Standards in lessons and GCSE results are above average in food technology and child development, about average in textiles and graphics but below average in electronics and resistant materials. Results have been affected by a shortage of teachers and a lack of effort and interest by some students, in resistant materials especially.
10. In geography, history and religious education, standards in lessons in Years 10 and 11 and GCSE results are above average. Students achieve relatively better results in these humanities subjects than in their other subjects. Work is well presented and students learn to link evidence to their own knowledge and construct well-reasoned arguments.
11. GCSE results in French are above the national average. Results in German are below average. Students progress well in both subjects, though standards in lessons are better in French than in German, in which students have less time to prepare for examinations. Achievement in Latin and classics is good. Within the time allocation for a single subject, students achieve above average results in classical studies and broadly average results in Latin. Standards in lessons are in line with results. Students learn to appreciate many aspects of Greek and Roman times as well as the structure of language.
12. Results in information and communication technology have fluctuated. In 2001, GCSE results for combined information and communication technology and business studies were below average and, although better grades were obtained in 2000, students did not do as well as in their other subjects. Inspection evidence is that standards in information and communication technology are rising rapidly. In lessons in Years 10 and 11, progress is good for students studying for GCSE, but other students do not have enough opportunities to develop their computing skills across the curriculum. The school is aware that standards are lower in information and communication technology in Years 10 and 11 than in other subjects and governors are investing substantial resources as part of their information and communication technology strategy. The new head of department is taking a strong lead in this. Business studies was also sampled during the inspection. In lessons, students progress well and GCSE results for business studies are good.

### **Students' attitudes, values and personal development**

13. Students have very good attitudes to school and their work and thus contribute well to the progress they make. They are loyal to the school. In their responses to the inspection questionnaire, a large proportion of parents confirmed that their children like school. They arrive in good heart in the mornings, and are more enthusiastic about learning than reported at the last inspection, as observed, for example, in a Year 9 music lesson where students were learning about poly-rhythms based on the African samba and in a Year 11 English lesson where they tried to understand the feelings of characters in *The Merchant of Venice*. Their keenness helps them do well. In a Year 8 mathematics lesson, for example, they were very attentive to the teacher's explanation about fairness, which helped them understand the purpose of lesson activities and to

progress quickly in understanding probability. Students participate very well in lesson activities. In a Year 9 science lesson, for example, they eagerly participated in question and answer session on voltage, including drawing diagrams on the writing board, and in a Year 10 business studies lesson they took much interest in trying to explain the concept of business growth. Likewise, students participate well in extra-curricular activities; during the inspection good numbers of students were observed in lunchtime and after school clubs. Those students with special educational needs or learning the English language are well integrated in lessons; they also have good attitudes to their work and respond well to the support that they receive.

14. The personal development of the students is good. When there are opportunities to take initiative, work independently and choose their activities, students show strong commitment. For example, students in a Year 11 art class, planning a demonstration on how to rearrange elements of a composition, happily continued their discussion through into the break. Students investigate effectively in mathematics, as observed in a Year 9 lesson, when they worked together well and achieved high quality enlargements, using appropriate materials. Students do their homework and coursework well. They understand the importance of hard work but generally do not appreciate how they are progressing, relative to national expectations, and therefore are not fully in a position to take responsibility of their own achievements. Prefects, head boy, head girl and their deputies, and those who are involved with the School Council, take their roles seriously, as do the younger students, who work as receptionists. Students who take part in extra-curricular activities, including residential trips, organise themselves well.
15. Students behave well, overall. In lessons observed behaviour was usually good - and in one third of lessons behaviour was very good. The vast majority proceeded without interruption, which contributed significantly to students' good progress. Very occasionally, students were disinclined to work and lessons were not well planned enough to capture their interest - as in design and technology (resistant materials), for example. Students respond quickly to staff and teachers, and are friendly to visitors. They are well behaved at break and lunchtimes but are not always careful in congested circulation areas. A little boisterousness occurs but inspectors saw no incidents of oppressive behaviour. Bullying is rare. Students treat school property, including displays, with care. Fixed period exclusions have doubled since the last inspection and are above average but are used appropriately to contain misbehaviour: expectations of behaviour are high. The number of permanent exclusions is almost the same as at the last inspection. Procedures for exclusion are correctly followed.
16. Relationships throughout the school are very good. All groups of students mix very well; they are happy and friendly. They work co-operatively in lessons, as observed, for instance, in practical activities in science and in group discussions in English. Students show respect for the views and feelings of others - a good example of this was seen in a history lesson when Year 11 students were discussing "How did Hitler become dictator?" They listen courteously, as evident in a Year 9 literacy lesson, where students were reading aloud the autobiography of Mohammad Ali (the ex-boxing champion).
17. Attendance, at the time of the last inspection, was good but it is satisfactory now, being broadly in line with the national average. Whilst illness accounts for most of the authorised absences, a sizeable proportion of absence is due to some parents taking their children away on holiday during term time. Unauthorised absence, which is slightly below the national average, is mostly because the school does not authorise absence for which parents have not supplied a valid reason. Most students arrive on time in the morning, though there is a little lateness in coming to some lessons, mostly because of problems crossing the site.

## **HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?**

18. The quality of teaching is good. In 96 per cent of lessons teaching was satisfactory or better, in 68 per cent good or better, in 19 per cent very good and in one per cent excellent. The quality of learning followed a similar pattern. The main features of good teaching at Nower Hill are teachers' good use of their subject knowledge and well-planned lessons, in which work is organised so students learn systematically. Expectations are generally high and students are well managed; they work in a supportive and friendly environment. Teaching is much better than at the last inspection: there is considerably more good and very good teaching now.
19. In English, teachers' very good knowledge of language and of literature helps them to focus students' attention on what they should learn. This was observed, for example, in a Year 8 lesson where students made very good progress in understanding the use of language in dialect, and in a

Year 11 lesson, where students' understanding of the plot of *Romeo and Juliet* developed quickly, through a drafting exercise. English teachers place good emphasis on literacy. Students in Year 10 were observed making good progress in descriptive writing through the teacher's effective focus on the impact of specific words (for example, *filthy* treasure, *reluctantly* released). Reading lessons in Years 8 and 9 help all students to improve their reading and specific help is given to those who need it, as observed, for example, with Year 8 students, who through improving their knowledge of punctuation become more perceptive in their reading. Teachers in most subjects help students to develop their literacy skills. In history, for example, students in Year 9 improved their written accounts of the outbreak of World War I through the teacher's good emphasis on language (such as the implications of using the word *murderer*) and of description arousing sympathy. Support given to students learning to speak English is good. A small group of Year 9 students were helped to keep up with their English course work through attention to the use of words, including repetition of similar sounds (alliteration), and words which sound like what they represent (onomatopoeia), and so they deepened their understanding of poems they were reading.

20. In mathematics, teachers draw on their subject knowledge to give clear explanations. Year 10 students have good knowledge of co-ordinates in four quadrants and made good progress in a lesson observed, drawing graphs of higher order equations, because the teacher explained ideas very clearly, including symmetry. Numeracy is well taught in mathematics and other teachers help students to cope with mathematics concepts as they arise in lessons. In the best science lessons, subject knowledge is very effectively used and abstract ideas are conveyed in simple terms so students make rapid progress - for example, in understanding why chemists need to use molar quantities (Year 11) and in evaluating heat loss in different circumstances (Year 10).
21. Confident use of knowledge and understanding enables specialist religious education teachers to capture the interest of students and move them on in their learning. Year 11 students made very good progress in learning about Hindu beliefs about Brahman and Atman, with well-judged use of the fig and salt stories. However, in Years 8 and 9, several non-specialists teach religious education and, while lessons are satisfactory overall, learning is not as good as with specialist teachers. Arrangements for teaching personal, social and health education mean that 48 staff teach the subject, to their tutor groups. While most cope reasonably, and a few help students to learn very effectively (for example, about culture and identity in Year 8), the overall quality is variable and not as good as in the school overall.
22. Teachers draw well on their knowledge and understanding in most design and technology lessons, to help students gain practical skills and develop their understanding of the principles of design. Lessons in food and textiles are usually good: teachers identify clearly what they expect students to achieve and plan lessons to enable them to do so. Inadequate planning detracts from students' progress in a few lessons in electronics and resistant materials.
23. In nearly all lessons, the full lesson time is effectively filled with appropriate, well planned activities. In music, drama and physical education, group work and evaluation are well used to develop students' understanding and skills. In music, for example, Year 9 students made very good progress in understanding rhythm patterns, which they developed through group work after an initial introduction; later, they evaluated their work and targets were set for improvement. Group work is also used very well in drama - in a Year 10 lesson, for example, after a series of warm-up activities, students worked in small groups on the theme "runaways", and later evaluated their ideas. A Year 11 class in physical education made good progress in understanding how tournaments are organised through setting up competitions in badminton, practising and reviewing their skills, though evaluation is not used consistently well in physical education.
24. Since the last inspection, the school has given attention to planning for the full range of students' abilities in lessons. In most lessons seen, all students were well occupied and made good progress. Teachers use questioning effectively to gauge students' understanding and challenge them further, and are careful to involve all students in the class. The grouping of students according to their attainment assists their progress in science (in Years 10 and 11) and in mathematics. Several mathematics lessons were visited in Year 9, for example, and most were good. A class of high ability, working on the enlargement of shapes and a class of middle ability students working on number sequences both progressed well because the work was well matched to their understanding. In the best science lessons, students are well challenged - as observed with Year 11 students, who built on their knowledge of fertilisers when they prepared ammonium nitrate. In Years 8 and 9, students are not grouped by ability for science. While lessons broadly match the overall ability level of the class, opportunities are missed to challenge the most able (usually the teachers identify those who do not understand and give extra support). Helpful strategies, such as reviewing earlier work at the start of the lesson, and careful planning with clear

explanations of what students should achieve by the end of the lesson, were features in good Year 8 and 9 lessons but not common to all; in some lessons students did not learn enough.

25. Computers are very well used in information and communication technology lessons. New technology enables rapid progress. For example, using computer projection to demonstrate two files at once on a split screen enabled Year 10 students to understand ideas quickly. Examples were seen of computers used in other subjects - in science and in Latin - and many students use computers to help them with their own work. Generally, however, not enough use is made of computers in subjects other than information and communication technology. The school knows this is a weakness and is putting extensive resources into improving facilities. Resources other than computers are well used. Videos are used effectively to bring subjects alive - aspects of Brazil in a well organised Year 8 geography lesson, for example. The library is well used by English teachers (for Year 8 and 9 lessons) and by other classes for reference. The course materials used in Latin support learning excellently.
26. Expectations are generally high. In the best modern foreign languages lessons, teachers make good use of the foreign language to create a foreign ambience and improve listening skills; they provide challenging written work, for both lesson time and homework. Year 9 students made good progress in French, for example, in talking about their daily routines as the teacher increased the challenge of tasks, so they combined actions and times to produce long sentences. In a Year 10 German lesson, students who did not find the subject easy progressed well in reading, writing, listening and speaking because the teacher provided a good range of tasks which helped them build on their understanding. The more consistent use of the foreign language in all modern language lessons is an area for improvement. Expectations in Latin and classics are high. Lessons proceed with a brisk pace, so students make very good use of their time. In art, teachers' very high expectations help students to produce very good sketchbooks for GCSE. Only occasionally were lessons seen where expectations were not high enough (as in a few design and technology lessons) - in these cases, lack of intervention by the teacher meant that students were not moved on in their learning. The climate for learning is good. With very few exceptions, students are well managed, behave well and have good opportunity to work individually and in groups as well as in the whole class. Teachers show commitment to helping individuals to progress. Relationships are very good. In history, for example, the teachers' encouraging manner helps students to contribute openly and learn from others. Homework is effectively used, on the whole. It is regularly set, although amounts vary.
27. Students who are at an early stage of learning English progress well. Teaching and support offered by the specialist teacher, assistants and members of the learning development department are good. For example, a bilingual learning support assistant uses her knowledge of grammar to extend students' use of words, to improve their understanding and pronunciation. Any difficulties with understanding or homework are checked so students can participate fully in all lessons. English teachers provide additional materials to help students learning to cope with English. For older students, further help is available in the curriculum support lessons, an option choice that replaces one GCSE subject. In a support lesson for Year 11 students, concepts and technical words in physics and mathematics were explained to them individually and they progressed well. Subject teachers are not always aware that these students do not understand technical vocabulary, as observed occasionally, in science, for example.
28. Students with special educational needs generally keep up in their lessons. They learn effectively, especially when they are taught individually. Learning development staff focus carefully on students' Individual Education Plans and arrange work in small steps so they learn systematically. All teachers have copies of students' Individual Education Plans but, while teachers adapt work as the lesson proceeds, the quality of planning for individual needs varies. Learning support assistants give effective help in subject lessons.
29. Students learn well at Nower Hill. Their overall achievement in GCSE examinations is very good. They start at their comprehensive school one year later (in Year 8) than most. Teachers' good organisation of lessons helps them gain knowledge and understanding rapidly. Relationships are very good and students are confident about learning and ask when they do not understand. Marking gives them a clear indication of how they are achieving, though inconsistencies in practice occur, in many subjects. Their learning is assisted by their keenness to progress. They take advantage of extra opportunities to learn - participation in extra-curricular activities is high - and respond well to opportunities to revise and prepare for examinations. In all years they learn effectively, both as individuals and as groups. They take advantage of opportunities for independent learning, for example, in the library and through using computers. As the school implements its information technology strategy, such opportunities are increasing rapidly.

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

### The Curriculum

30. The curriculum is good, as at the last inspection. Strengths include the range of GCSE subjects provided in Years 10 and 11 and richness of extra-curricular activities. Overall, it is well suited to students' needs and enables them to achieve very good GCSE results - and a good proportion (90 per cent) progress onto college or sixth form courses when they leave. Students have equal opportunities to study all subjects.
31. A broad range of subjects is provided from Year 8. All students study classics and they can choose to take Latin from Year 9: both subjects can be taken at GCSE. Good opportunities are provided in creative arts. Students take drama from Year 8, in addition to music and art - and they progress well in all three. Students in Years 10 and 11 study either double-award science or separate sciences (chemistry, physics, biology) and results are good, overall. However, in two subjects in Years 10 and 11 students are not receiving their entitlement (so statutory requirements are not met). Only students taking GCSE religious education study the subject at this stage. Not enough use is made of information and communication technology in all subjects to satisfy requirements; the school recognises this shortcoming and plans to redress it through its information technology strategy.
32. Literacy is very well provided, in English: literacy and reading lessons in Years 8 and 9 help students to improve their skills. Teachers in other subjects give systematic attention to reading and writing. Numeracy is well covered in mathematics. While there is no systematic approach to numeracy in other subjects, students cope effectively on the whole, because of teachers' clear explanations.
33. The personal, social and health education programme is organised by heads of year and is satisfactory - requirements are met for health and sex education and drugs awareness. However, documentation, beyond a general overview, is thin and the school has initiated plans to strengthen this and include citizenship. Careers education is well developed and very effective. Links with employers and specialist agencies are good. Events at key points are arranged to help students make choices and the school hosts a successful post-16 choices evening. All students participate in a two-week work-experience placement in Year 10, which is well supported. While the local careers service is no longer able to provide individual interviews for every student, the school's own careers co-ordinator arranges events and is accessible to all students. Students receive tutorial guidance in early morning form time but the use made of this 20 minutes is very variable. Apart from registration, younger students are encouraged to read but in several form times observed little happened. Better use could be made of the time. Guidance is supplemented for Year 11 students by study skills lessons, which cover a range of topics which help students to plan the right step for them, after Nower Hill. In a very good lesson observed, the timetable for course-work preparation and visits to local sixth forms and colleges was explained and students' awareness raised of the importance of working effectively and making best use of their time.
34. Extra-curricular provision is unusually good - through both the range of opportunities available and also the level of participation. After-school dance, available to all, regularly includes around 50 students. Activities are held both at lunchtime and after school. Provision in music (for example, the saxophone ensemble, wind band, steel band) and in physical education (for example, trampolining, football, netball) is particularly good. Revision classes are held in most subjects and students have good opportunities for independent learning through using facilities in the library, which is open for homework club several evenings. During the inspection, this was a hive of activity, all computers and working spaces in use. A very happy business-like atmosphere is engendered. Students have access to computer rooms outside of lessons and use the machines for homework and examination course work. The school makes good use of its proximity to London to enrich learning in lessons - with visits to the theatre and concerts (to enhance drama and music, for example) and to lectures (for science).
35. Links with the community further enhance opportunities, in a variety of ways. Joint courses with local colleges have been devised - one for students who wish to sample a variety of vocational areas and a second for those who are ready for a wider range of learning styles than school can provide. An interesting trans-age project, with older citizens working with students, engenders good relations and strengthens students' literacy skills. Local employers collaborate well in the



careers education programme. The Royal Mail has played a key role in a number of ways, including a Year 11 conference, and the development of National Records of Achievement. The most significant community links have been with local schools and colleges, as a result of the school's Beacon status. Links with local middle schools contribute to joint curricular approaches in mathematics, modern foreign languages and design and technology, and thereby to continuity in the transition between Years 7 and 8. Other local high schools work closely with Nower Hill in providing careers education and guidance, and collaboration has greatly benefited opportunities in Latin and classics, both at Nower Hill and in other schools. A measure of the strength of the links is in the support the school has for its joint application for specialist arts college status - to develop further its good work in art, drama, dance and music jointly with community groups. Links with local schools and colleges are better than at the last inspection.

36. Students at the early stages of learning English receive help either individually or in small groups. They are withdrawn from lessons, usually from modern languages, because they need to learn English as quickly as possible if they are going to keep up with the curriculum. The school systematically provides extensive and effective support for students with little knowledge of English, and also for those whose language is equal to everyday demands but who need to develop reading, writing and vocabulary further. In Year 9, a parallel English course is available that reinforces the English syllabus, in smaller classes. Students in Year 10 can choose a curriculum enrichment course, which replaces a GCSE optional subject and gives the opportunity to improve language skills and keep up with homework and coursework. The integrated humanities GCSE provides a course which covers wide-ranging topics and issues but does not make the same demands on reading and comprehension skills as other humanities subjects.
37. Support for students who have special educational needs is provided for individuals, small groups and in subject lessons. Learning development staff follow schemes of work and their planning is consistently good. Individual and small group support is focused mostly on literacy and numeracy skills and students' records are regularly updated, as they progress. Schemes of work in subjects include guidance on work for students with special educational needs, although the quality of this varies. The school makes effective use of additional specialist support agencies, for example, for students who find it hard to control their own behaviour. Extra-curricular activities are provided by the learning development department for students at break and lunchtimes. Overall, the provision is good.
38. Several features of the curriculum provide extra challenge and interest for students who are gifted and talented: opportunities to study Latin and classics up to GCSE and the chance to take GCSE mathematics and classics one year early, for example. The development of thinking skills is effectively used by individual teachers to promote reasoning and subject achievement. Extra-curricular activities and course-work in music, physical education and drama support students in achieving high standards. In Year 11, revision programmes and study skills lessons are used effectively. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 builds well on that lower down the school and prepares students very well for GCSE and progression post-16.

### **Students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development**

39. The overall provision for students' personal development is good. A strong school ethos, characterised by very good relationships and mutual respect, provides a supportive context for students' moral, social and cultural development. The commitment and attitudes of staff set a very positive example for students. They are good role models. They often use opportunities that arise in the classroom to promote students' personal development, although planning for this is not reflected in written guidance for staff.
40. The provision for spiritual education remains unsatisfactory, as reported at the last inspection. The school has been unable to follow up some of the development work that took place immediately after the last inspection and continues to provide only one act of collective worship for students each week. Opportunities to develop spiritual awareness and insights tend to be limited to religious education, music, art and drama where students are able to reflect and respond to topics in a personal way. The school has not given enough consideration to ways in which different subjects and assemblies can contribute to this aspect of students' education.
41. Good provision is made for students' moral development. The school's code of conduct and the daily routines of the school successfully promote positive values and help students distinguish right from wrong. General adherence to school rules ensures an orderly environment. Uniform requirements are generally met and most students look neat and business-like, although some, girls especially, interpret uniform requirements to suit themselves, at times. Valuable discussion

on ethical issues and moral dilemmas takes place in a number of subjects, such as English, design and technology, science and religious education. Discussion encourages students to consider a range of viewpoints and think through some of the choices they will need to make in life.

42. Social education is very good, with opportunities for students to develop social and collaborative skills in many of their lessons. Students can also participate in various aspects of school life. The School Council enables them to contribute to decisions about facilities in the school and to influence school policies, such as the teaching and learning policy. Year 10 and 11 students can exercise a variety of responsibilities around the school, such as undertaking prefect duties or helping in Year 8 tutor groups. Last year, students in Year 8 took part in an environmental garden project and one thousand bulbs were donated and planted by students, who later presented the daffodils to local residents.
43. Provision for students' cultural development is also very good. Opportunities for students to develop an understanding of different cultures are well provided in subjects such as English, drama, history, geography, religious education, Latin, classics, art and music. The school successfully draws on the different cultural traditions represented within its own community to promote students' understanding of cultural diversity, both in day-to-day teaching and in specific projects, such as the Year 8 international arts festival, held in June each year. Cultural interests and horizons are extended through students' participation in the school's excellent extra-curricular programme of sport, music, drama and other activities. Students are also given a wide range of opportunities to go on educational visits and take part in foreign exchanges or visits.

### **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?**

44. The school has good understanding of students' needs. Pastoral care is well organised and has strengthened since the last inspection - for example, the number of year co-ordinators has been doubled in Years 8 and 9. Students establish very good relationships with adults and with one another. Staff ensure that students settle well into school, beginning with very good links with the feeder middle schools. They know students well, and pay good attention to their welfare needs and provide them with good personal support. Students who are unwell receive appropriate care and arrangements for first aid are good. Teachers pay suitable attention to safety matters in lessons. Students are also guided on matters relating to their welfare, development and future through work in lessons, the personal, social and health education programme, and careers guidance, which is well organised.
45. Child protection arrangements are satisfactory and vulnerable students who need specific care and support are well catered for. The school makes good use of external agencies and specialists in supporting students' welfare and learning. The school implements a sound health and safety policy. Most of the health and safety matters raised by the last inspection have been resolved. Inspectors noticed some new hazards and these have been reported to the school. The school-keeper ensures a clean and safe environment.
46. The school achieves good standards of behaviour through a system of valuing and caring for students, well-established rules, opportunities to take responsibility, rewards and sanctions. The behaviour policy is consistently applied in classes. Teachers manage students well and, almost invariably, work in lessons proceeds without interruption. The school is successful in creating an environment where all groups of students work and play well together. There is no evidence of oppressive behaviour in the school. Bullying is rare and students are confident that, if it occurs, it is effectively dealt with. Students learn in a safe and secure environment and make good progress.
47. Arrangements to promote attendance are satisfactory. Registration requirements are met and absence is appropriately recorded, identified and reported. Arrangements to follow up absence are satisfactory. The school uses the education welfare service well. Attendance is also supported by a capable welfare assistant, who promptly contacts parents where there are concerns - but not all absence is followed up by contacting parents on the first day of absence. There is little active discouragement for parents who take family holidays during term-time. The welfare assistant records late arrivals and the monitoring of these is satisfactory.
48. Procedures for supporting and monitoring personal development are good and carried out effectively by the pastoral team. Tracking sheets and the reporting system help in monitoring students' development. Aspects of the curriculum, including extra-curricular activities, visits and

visitors, and opportunities for students to take responsibility, contribute well to students' self-esteem and confidence. In many lessons, opportunities are planned for students to show initiative and take responsibility. In classes, students work well together and are prompt in following instructions. Procedures for dealing with bad behaviour are fast and provide appropriate deterrents.

49. Assessment arrangements are good in many subjects, although there are weaknesses. Nevertheless, they are significantly better than at the last inspection, when assessment was a key area for improvement. Students' work is regularly marked and they know how they are getting on. Most departments apply their own or the school's assessment policy but, in some, practice is inconsistent, as in geography, mathematics and information and communication technology.
50. Assessment information is well used to identify those who may be underachieving and students' specific needs. Academic support for those students whose needs are clearly identified is good and includes the summer school, fast-tracking, link courses with local colleges and extra support for those with special educational needs and those starting to learn English. However, the assessment information is not consistently well used by departments to inform curricular plans and to help students to progress. Examples of good practice were seen in modern foreign languages, where speaking was improved through discussion. In music, recordings made during units of work enable teachers to monitor progress and students to refine their work. Procedures are good in English and in design and technology. However, the use of assessment is at an early stage of development in most subjects. Relatively little use is made of assessment in geography, information and communication technology and science, and only satisfactory use in mathematics. The school is aware of inconsistencies in assessment practice and the need to develop more uniform approaches.
51. Assessment information is collected centrally. Effective use is made of accumulated information contained in the students' directories for Years 8 and 9. Information gained from testing students on entry in Year 8 and National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 is well used to set targets for GCSE in subjects and the school overall. The school is planning to track the progress of individual students, relative to previous test scores. Teachers in some subjects have information on their classes. Good use is made of assessment records in English to set targets and help students to improve. However, there is not yet any common approach and the information is not generally shared with students.

## **HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?**

52. The school works in effective partnership with parents. They show good levels of interest in their children's work and the school can rely on parents' support to address any concerns about their children's performance. The parents' and friends' association is an active body and raises funds for the school. Parents are generally satisfied with its work. They feel that their children like the school; they are pleased with the school's high expectations and the help that the school provides for their children to become mature and responsible. Inspectors confirm parents' favourable views. Parents would like to see improvement in some areas of the school's work. They are not happy about the amount of homework. Inspectors found that it is usually regularly set but the amount varies. Some parents feel that the school does not work closely with them. The school does reasonably well in reaching out to parents but does not always explain its work - for example, what constitutes extra-curricular activity and the full programme of opportunities.
53. The quality of information provided for parents about the school is satisfactory. The prospectus and governors' reports are informative. Consultation and information meetings for parents are frequently held; parents' evenings are well attended. Some parents feel that they are not well informed about how their children are getting on. Inspectors found that students' annual written reports give adequate information but they could provide more explanations. The reports indicate what students can do but not what is expected for their age so that parents can see their children's performance in relation to average standards. Partnership with parents of students with special educational needs is a strength and their involvement has positive impact on the motivation and progress of students.

## **HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?**

### **Leadership and management**

54. The school is well led. Overall direction is very clear and purposeful, provided by the headteacher, senior managers and governors working in partnership. The governors have actively supported a course of steady improvement since the financial and consequent management problems which developed about three years ago. The most significant step was the appointment of the current head about 18 months ago, who has provided the necessary experience and vision to strengthen co-ordination and build on the many examples of good practice throughout the school.
55. The headteacher works closely with his senior team: responsibilities are clearly delegated and fulfilled well. Leadership is strong in most subjects and in pastoral matters. Staff are deeply committed to their students. They are attentive to their views and the views of parents. Relationships are very good among all groups. The ethos for learning is good.
56. The governing body is committed to the success and prosperity of the school. Among their members are people of unusual strengths, including leading members of the local authority's education committee: relationships with the local authority are much closer now than a few years ago. Governors have very good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the school. Between 1999 and 2000, as governors weathered a financial crisis, expenditure was reined-in. The outcome was a financial recovery in one year, compared with the three years expected by the local education authority. Priorities are funded. The school's strategy to improve the use of information and communication technology is starting to have effect. With generous resourcing and the appointment of a very capable assistant headteacher, standards are improving. Governors have a keen sense of best value. The school's decision to both buy and lease computers is planned to keep machines up to date, economically. They have managed, in spite of budget cut-backs between 1999 and 2000, to maintain the premises in good decorative order. Their evaluation of their own committee structure, to make sure they serve the school as effectively as they can, puts the curriculum at the heart of their decisions. They are justly pleased with the development of Latin and classics throughout the school, for the breadth this provides and the challenge for students of all abilities. Governors meet requirements, except in Years 10 and 11 for the provision of information and communication technology and of religious education for all students. Opportunities for reflection or collective worship are provided in assemblies, but on most mornings students attend form times and in these there is rarely any spiritual element. Requirements for collective worship are not met.
57. The annual review system is helping managers to systematically review results and improve teaching and planning in the curricular areas for which they are responsible. Arrangements for performance management are in place: lessons are observed and teachers are helped to build on their strengths. Staff changes, however, have meant that there are many new teachers in science and they have not had enough support, which has affected the quality of teaching, especially in Years 8 and 9. Intervention by senior managers is starting to provide the necessary support. Both special educational needs provision and support for students learning to speak English are systematically and well co-ordinated.
58. The overall aims of the school, firmly focused on teaching and learning and on raising achievement, are reflected throughout the school improvement plan and are used to evaluate its effectiveness. Both are better now than at the last inspection. The school has Beacon status in recognition of its strengths. Links, fostered as a result of this, with local middle schools, secondary schools and colleges promote continuity for students and help them progress onto courses which are best for them. Staff provide a variety of opportunities for students and colleagues at Nower Hill and in partner institutions. Links fostered through Latin, for example, extend opportunities for students through Saturday morning classes and a summer conference at Harrow School. Monies coming into the school because of its Beacon status are very well spent. Similarly, funds for in-service training are effectively used. The school is mindful of the high turnover of staff in recent years and arrangements for newly qualified teachers, and those experienced but new to the school, are good on the whole. Each new teacher is supported by a mentor.
59. The school's income is average, for its size. The budget is well managed. Three years ago it tackled a substantial deficit and annual expenditure now is contained within its income. In achieving this, the school cut back in expenditure on premises and equipment. The shortage in the number of computers is now being remedied. Bearing in mind the attainment of students on entry, which is average, and the very good results achieved, together with the good quality of teaching overall, the school provides good value for money.

60. Day-to-day arrangements are managed well. Administration is good, and individual staff are attentive and very welcoming. Parents mentioned to inspectors some difficulties with communication: the telephone system has recently been replaced and should be more efficient now. The school makes effective use of information and communication technology for administrative purposes: attendance and finance, for example.

## Resources

61. Provision for staffing, accommodation and learning resources is satisfactory, overall. Turn-over of staff has been high, recently. The school's programme for teachers new to the school and newly qualified teachers is good. The match of teachers and support staff to the requirements of the curriculum is generally good, but there are a few areas where a mismatch detracts from the quality of teaching and learning. In religious education (and, to a lesser extent, in geography) the use of non-specialist teachers affects learning. In science, teachers - especially those new to the school and those without teaching qualifications gained in England - have not received enough support from within the science faculty. This weakness has mostly affected science classes in Years 8 and 9. The school augments the income it receives for students' special educational needs and provides well for them. Resources for students at an early stage of learning English are well spent: they make good progress. Good literacy provision helps students who are learning English, as well as all other lower-attaining students.
62. Learning resources: books, equipment and materials are satisfactorily provided in departments. The weakness is in the number of computers, in subject areas and computer suites: overall, only one machine for every 10 students. The school is remedying this through considerable investment in its information and communication technology strategy, which will achieve the governors' target of one computer for every seven students by December 2001, ahead of the Government's schedule. Students make very good use of computers outside of lesson time - before and after school and in the lunchtime. Those in the library are particularly well used. The library is a welcoming and efficient resource for independent learning: it has a very good stock of books, computers and software and is building a stock of videos; it supports homework clubs before and after school; two learning support assistants have had their hours adjusted to support students doing their homework. Several departments, such as art, make demands on the library for book boxes for project work; English and some science lessons take place in the library. The library is heavily used during lesson times on two days each week, and has the potential to play an even more significant role in learning.
63. The school makes efficient use of its various buildings, crowded onto a restricted site. Flat roofs present persistent problems and the local authority is managing difficulties with the foundation of one of the major buildings. Three science laboratories are in need of refurbishment and one food technology room is in poor condition. Otherwise, the school successfully maintains its buildings within the small sums it can afford to allocate for the purpose, assisted by helpful caretaking staff. A local community service group maintains well the internal decorations on a planned rolling programme. Poor carpeting is being replaced systematically. Intelligent use has been made of vacant spaces to provide additional offices and cupboards. The governors have identified possible locations for the placement of students' lockers (which some parents mention as a concern). All teachers without very senior management roles have their own classrooms within faculty suites of rooms, most of which now have their own teachers' workroom. Thus most teachers can securely identify with a specific location and subject teams can develop areas for their own curricular needs. The school is justly proud of the Gristwood Centre. The newest of the buildings, it provides excellent specialist accommodation for dance, drama and music and is well used both during school time and for community activities.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

64. *To raise further the standards of work, attainment and progress of students, the governors, headteacher, senior management team and staff should:*
- (1) strengthen the monitoring and support for science teachers, particularly those teaching students in Years 8 and 9 (paragraphs 7, 24 and 87);
  - (2) accelerate plans to increase students' use of information and communication technology in all subjects, especially in Years 10 and 11 (paragraphs 12, 25 and 126);

- (3) make more systematic and detailed use of assessment information with students to track their progress and set targets for improvement (paragraphs 14, 50 and 51);
- (4) provide religious education for all students in Years 10 and 11 and more opportunities for reflection in lessons and collective worship (paragraphs 31, 40 and 56).

In addition to the preceding areas for improvement, the following less significant weaknesses need attention: the monitoring of marking to improve its consistency (paragraph 29); improvement in the scheme of work for personal, social and health education and the use of form time (paragraph 33); and support for religious education and geography staff, especially those teaching Years 8 and 9 (paragraphs 29 and 117). Refurbishment is needed of one food technology room and three science laboratories (paragraph 63).

Reference to assessment was included in a key issue of the last report. While better use is made of assessment now, it is still little used to guide the progress of individuals. Spiritual development and collective worship were also weaknesses in the last report.

The school is well aware of its strengths and areas for improvement. Plans are in hand to improve science and information and communication technology provision and the use of assessment information to track students' progress.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

### Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	203
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	61

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
Number	2	39	97	56	9	0	0
Percentage	1	19	48	28	4	0	0

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

### Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll	Y8 – Y11
Number of students on the school's roll	1204
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	101

Special educational needs	Y8 – Y11
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	27
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	199

English as an additional language	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	453

Student mobility in the last school year	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	31
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	35

### Attendance

Authorised absence	%
School data	7.0
National comparative data	7.7

Unauthorised absence	%
School data	0.9
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 students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001 (2000)	157 (165)	136 (135)	293 (300)

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	129 (105)	118 (129)	115 (116)
	Girls	126 (98)	112 (107)	102 (88)
	Total	255 (203)	230 (236)	217 (204)
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	87 (68)	78 (79)	74 (68)
	National	(63)	(62)	(55)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	68 (38)	59 (56)	36 (33)
	National	(28)	(38)	(23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	94 (112)	122 (123)	126 (118)
	Girls	110 (116)	116 (103)	114 (99)
	Total	204 (228)	238 (226)	240 (217)
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	70 (76)	81 (75)	82 (72)
	National	(64)	(64)	(60)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	30 (26)	59 (52)	40 (32)
	National	(31)	(37)	(28)

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 students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001 (2000)	148 (159)	146 (139)	294 (298)

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	92 (107)	142 (147)	146(155)
	Girls	99 (102)	138 (127)	145 (130)
	Total	191 (209)	280 (274)	291(285)
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	65 (70)	95 (92)	99 (96)
	National	(47.4)	(90.6)	(95.6)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per student	School	46.5 (47)
	National	(38.5)

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



### **Ethnic background of students**

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	38
Black – African heritage	29
Black – other	31
Indian	224
Pakistani	34
Bangladeshi	9
Chinese	7
White	566
Any other minority ethnic group	266

### **Teachers and classes**

#### **Qualified teachers and classes: Y8 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	68.9
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.3

#### **Education support staff: Y8 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	47.9

#### **Deployment of teachers: Y8 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.2
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#### **Average teaching group size: Y8 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	22.5
Key Stage 4	23.5

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### **Recruitment of teachers**

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	19.6
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	26.1

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3.9
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

### **Exclusions in the last school year**

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	7	0
Black – African heritage	2	0
Black – other	7	1
Indian	7	0
Pakistani	2	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	64	6
Other minority ethnic groups	21	0

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

### **Financial information**

Financial year	2000-01
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	£
Total income	3,514,068
Total expenditure	3,448,729
Expenditure per student	2899
Balance brought forward from previous year	33,537
Balance carried forward to next year	98,876

## Results of the survey of parents and carers

### Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1204
Number of questionnaires returned	229

### Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	32	61	4	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	24	52	9	0	15
Behaviour in the school is good.	27	46	12	1	14
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	24	47	10	5	14
The teaching is good.	25	53	7	1	14
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	23	35	16	5	21
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	33	49	9	0	9
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	44	43	6	0	7
The school works closely with parents.	18	44	21	3	14
The school is well led and managed.	23	52	7	2	16
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	26	51	4	1	18
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	20	37	15	1	27

### Other issues raised by parents

Thirty parents attended the meeting with the registered and lay inspectors before the inspection. Their comments were broadly in line with their responses to the questionnaire. The relatively high proportion of "Don't know" responses (in many cases over ten per cent) was probably due to the timing of the inspection. Parents of Year 8 students, new to the school in September, had very little familiarity with arrangements. Several parents at their meeting expressed concern about their children carrying their books in heavy bags throughout the school day. Governors and senior staff are making plans to install lockers, to ease this problem.

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

### ENGLISH

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

#### Strengths

- Standards are well above average: students achieve very well in English.
- Teaching is very good: students learn new skills very quickly.
- Schemes of work have been carefully planned to allow for full coverage of the National Curriculum.
- Leadership and management are very good: all teachers work well together to help students improve.
- Students behave very well and their attitudes are very good: they want to do their best.

#### Areas for improvement

- Marking shows some inconsistency: occasionally opportunities to comment critically on students' work are missed.
- Information and communication technology is underused and this limits students' learning experience: access to computers is difficult.

65. At the end of Year 9 in 2001, the results of the National Curriculum tests in English were well above the average for all schools nationally and the average for similar schools. Results in English are similar to those in science, but not quite as good as those in mathematics. Girls do better than boys, as nationally. The attainment of students, including those with special educational needs, those who are gifted and talented, and those with English as an additional language represents very good achievement up to the end of Year 9, relative to their achievement on entry, which is average in literacy.
66. In 2001, results in the GCSE English language examination were well above the national average for 2000 and the average for similar schools. Results were similar to those in 2000, when they were a little better than in other subjects. In English literature, results were well above average in 2000 and 2001. Girls do better than boys, as nationally. Achievement by the end of Year 11 is very good, relative to the results of the same students in the National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9.
67. Standards in lessons and work seen are well above what is expected for both 14 and 16 year olds. By the age of 14, speaking and listening are strengths. Students speak fluently using a wide range of vocabulary, as in a Year 9 lesson where groups discussed the purpose and organisation of different written passages. In class, students answer questions in extended sentences, though the less able speak more briefly. Listening skills are highly developed. Students pay close attention to what teachers and their friends say. For example, in a Year 9 lesson based on Gillian Clarke's *Miracle on St David's Day*, students listened carefully to the teacher's sensitive reading of the poem, and then to their friends in group discussion about the poem's meaning. Students respected others' opinions and were thoughtful in their comments. Students read aloud clearly, with attention to pace and pause. They hold the listener's interest easily, as in a Year 9 lesson, where students were reading extracts from their chosen books – such as an autobiography of Mohammed Ali – and showed a secure understanding of the contents. Students experience a wide variety of fiction and non-fiction. The most able read novels such as *Fahrenheit 451* and *Jane Eyre*, while the less able enjoy short stories. Students write confidently in various styles. They compose personal and business letters, expressing opinions on such topics as experiments on animals, and school uniform. They write their own poems and draft extended evaluations of well-known poems, such as Frost's *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*. They reflect on past experience and report on what other students enjoy reading. Most attain a high level of technical accuracy. Work is well paragraphed, clearly expressed and carefully punctuated. Spelling, however, is less consistent, especially in the work of middle and lower ability students.
68. By the age of 16, students speak and listen very well. They sustain an interesting discussion on their work on *Romeo and Juliet*. In groups, they adopt the role of a character such as Mercutio or Tybalt, explaining his behaviour. They use effective vocabulary and pose telling questions to the character being interviewed. Students listen very attentively to what others say and expand on others' ideas with supportive remarks. Students read aloud accurately and with enjoyment, as when taking roles in a scene from the *Merchant of Venice*. Their response to teachers' questions

shows they understand what they read. In their study of poetry, they grasp implicit meaning and know why the poet uses devices such as simile and hyperbole. In writing, students consolidate what they have learned in Years 8 and 9 and develop a style suited to literary criticism, though the less able write as they speak. Students explain how the opening scene of *Romeo and Juliet* engages an audience's interest, and they discuss the moral and social issues raised in *An Inspector Calls*. They compare social conventions portrayed in *Oliver Twist* and *The Chocolate War*, and the treatment of horror in *The Body Snatchers* and *Stone Cold*. Statements are well supported by quotations, although these are not always fully explained. Students express themselves fluently in well-crafted sentences. Paragraphing, punctuation and grammar are usually correct, and spelling is more consistent. In all year groups, drafting helps students to refine their ideas and reach a higher level of accuracy. Presentation is very good, often assisted by word-processing.

69. Teaching and learning are very good, and a little better in Years 10 and 11 than in Years 8 and 9. They were at least satisfactory in all lessons seen, good or better in nine-tenths, and very good, occasionally excellent, in two-fifths. As a result, students' attitudes and behaviour are also very good. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and understanding of language and literature, enabling them to ask key questions to extend students' thinking and assess learning. Occasionally, teachers direct questions at too few students and this means that not all are actively involved in learning, which restricts progress. Teachers give strong emphasis to basic skills, such as the use of apostrophes, correct spelling and vocabulary extension; as a result, students' work is accurate and well expressed. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, the teacher encouraged students to use thesauruses to find more precise words, such as 'excruciating' and 'melancholy'. This assisted students to give a more detailed interpretation of Gough's poem, *Being-in-love*. Teachers have very good relationships with students: their high expectations of what students can do is helping to raise attainment. The setting of more challenging essays – for example, on *Romeo and Juliet* – for the most able in Year 11 extends their thinking and explains the well above average number of students gaining the highest grades (A\*, A) in the GCSE examinations. Middle and lower ability students are given essays which stretch their own capabilities, and so they also achieve very well, with most gaining at least a grade E. The use of different material to match students' abilities is a strong feature of English classes. Teachers' careful organisation of students in mixed gender and mixed ability groups brings out the best in students and leads to very effective collaboration in group discussion. Teachers plan many varied activities to hold students' interest and to maintain a brisk pace. For example, in an excellent Year 8 lesson, the teacher began by asking students to read aloud their homework. The class moved on to look at word connotations and, in groups, students explored word meanings – with the help of dictionaries – and discovered new vocabulary. Their keen interest led to a lively feedback session, which allowed the teacher to assess the excellent progress made in language skills. Teachers generally mark work thoroughly, giving clear comments to help students do better. However, sometimes – in Years 8 and 9 – spelling errors go uncorrected and comments do not explain fully enough what would bring about improvement. Teachers work extremely hard to present material in a lively manner. Their enthusiasm helps students to learn very well.
70. The schemes of work give wide coverage of the National Curriculum, and students enjoy a rich variety of English topics. The poetry units are particularly well planned to include both modern and pre-twentieth century poems. Drama is a strong feature in the units of work, but information and communication technology, although included in the units, is not used enough. No computers are available in the department and accessibility to the computer room is difficult, restricting the way in which students learn. However, teachers encourage students to use the Internet for research, outside lesson times, as seen in students' written work and classroom displays. Less able students, including those with special educational needs, benefit from a literacy summer school, weekly literacy withdrawal lessons and good support from classroom assistants. Those at the early stage of learning English are helped to make very good progress by well-informed specialist support assistants. All students in Years 8 and 9 have a designated reading lesson in which books are read, discussed and evaluated in writing. This is raising the already good levels of literacy. The varied curriculum is enriched by many extra-curricular activities, such as theatre visits, participation in the Harrow Arts Festival and in poetry competitions, such as *Odyssey 2001*. Assessment procedures are good. Teachers use available data to plan units of work. The levels gained by students in the national tests taken by 14-year-olds are used to set target GCSE grades and this gives students a goal at which to aim. Teachers are conscientious in responding to weaknesses identified by assessment. For example, in a Year 11 lesson, the teacher explained carefully how students should comment on quotations from *Romeo and Juliet*, to improve their writing. In a Year 9 lesson, the teacher noticed misspellings of plural words whose singulars end in 'y'. Her quick response in the lesson and her clear explanation of spelling rules showed students where they were going wrong. Teachers are careful to share examination criteria with

students, who have details affixed to their exercise books. In a Year 11 lesson, the teacher expanded on the notes students had, and used the whiteboard very well to demonstrate how students could move from grade C to the highest grades (A\*, A). As a result, they were very clear what they needed to do in subsequent essays to raise standards.

71. Leadership and management are very good. The head of faculty has firm ideas on what she wants the subject area to achieve. Because she has fostered an excellent team spirit, all English teachers share a common commitment to raising attainment. They are ambitious to help boys achieve as well as girls, and have succeeded in raising boys' results to well above the national average for boys. This common commitment is a major factor in the high achievements of students in English. The school and the head of faculty give excellent support to the newly qualified English teacher and the two other teachers new to the faculty. All three new staff speak highly of how welcome they felt and how their contributions to English are valued. Resources are good and well deployed. For example, all classrooms have a television screen, and the video camera is effectively used – as observed in a Year 8 lesson, where pairs of students enjoyed presenting dialogues in different dialects: the presence of the camera motivated them to improve their speaking skills. Accommodation is enhanced by excellent wall displays, in classrooms and adjacent corridors, of students' work and of posters and key words relevant to learning.
72. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Attainment remains well above average, but achievement across the school is considerably better. Much closer attention is paid to developing literacy, as seen in the current schemes of work and in the literacy provision in Years 8 and 9. Lesson planning is much more closely linked to the National Curriculum requirements because schemes of work have been carefully revised and well resourced. Given the head of faculty's inspired leadership, the very good teaching and learning, and the very positive attitudes and behaviour of the students, the capacity for further improvement is very good.

### **Literacy**

73. The standard of literacy in the school is above average. In English, students read fluently and accurately, with good understanding. They write in different forms and achieve a high level of technical accuracy, though spelling is less consistent. A good start has been made in co-ordinating literacy across the curriculum. Last year, the head of English led a literacy liaison group; the school provided a training day for all staff; and departments conducted an audit of literacy skills relevant to their subjects. As a result, staff awareness of the importance of literacy was raised. A co-ordinator for literacy across the curriculum has been recently appointed, indicating the importance the school places on this. At present, opportunities arise in most subjects to allow students to practise their skills in reading and writing. In most subjects, reading is promoted by the use of key words and word-walls, though opportunities are sometimes missed, as in mathematics and geography, to refer to these. Students have opportunities to read aloud – as in history, childcare, and in art, where students read their own evaluations clearly. Students write well in most subjects and command a wide vocabulary. Opportunities for extended writing are provided in mathematics, where students explain their investigations, and in many other subjects, such as art, physical education and classical studies. In music, however, students do not have the chance to develop their written evaluations. In science, higher-attaining students in Years 10 and 11 speculate about life on other planets. Teachers emphasise the meaning of technical words, especially in Years 8 and 9, and stress the importance of spelling. This is helping to improve accuracy of written expression in science. In marking, some attention is paid in science to spelling, which in history work is well corrected. However, marking is not close enough in religious education, geography and mathematics, and spelling errors – of 'isosiles' for 'isosceles', for example – sometimes go unchecked.

## MATHEMATICS

The inspection covered main school mathematics including GCSE and an AS-level course undertaken by students in a Year 11 class who had previously taken GCSE in Year 10. In the lesson observed, students were studying a pure mathematics module. The teacher used good subject knowledge to explain clearly the work of the lesson. This maintained the students' interest and motivation as well as accelerating their learning. They developed their algebraic skills by using formulae to find areas of sectors and lengths of arcs of circles using radians. The teaching and learning were good.

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

### Strengths

- Results in recent years in both the standard assessment tests at the end of Year 9 and GCSE have been above, and sometimes well above, the national average.
- Overall teaching and learning are good; teachers prepare the lessons well and students are keen to learn.
- Teachers work well together and have a commitment to improve standards further.
- Students work well with their teachers and each other.

### Areas for improvement

- Students who find the subject difficult, including those with special educational needs, would benefit from tasks being broken down into smaller steps to accelerate their learning.
- Students would benefit from teachers devising and using a consistent method of marking class work and homework to better inform them on how they might improve,
- Improvements being made to the department's documentation need to be accelerated, to ensure schemes of work are complete and include guidance on the promotion of students' mental skills.

74. Results of the National Curriculum tests have been consistently above the national average. In both 2000 and 2001, results were well above the average when compared with all schools nationally and with similar schools. This represents good progress when compared with attainment on entry, which is average. Boys and girls do equally well. Students' performance is close to that in English and better than in science.
75. In GCSE mathematics in 2000, the proportion of students gaining the higher grades (A\*-C) was well above the average for all schools. The number of students gaining the highest (A\*, A) grades was very high - in the top five per cent of all schools. Results in 2001, although lower than 2000, remain well above the average for 2000. Across the full range of grades (A\*-G), results were above the national average. Students' performance in mathematics was better than in most other subjects. The differences between the achievements of boys and girls are not significant. Students make good progress across Years 10 and 11.
76. Standards in lessons and in work seen during the inspection, although covering a wide range, are overall above the national expectation. By the end of Year 9, higher-attaining students develop good drawing skills and use these to construct accurate enlargements of shapes. They understand and use the relationship between linear and square measure to find areas of the enlarged shapes. They are competent in the use of formulae to find areas and circumferences of circles. Calculators are used appropriately by middle-attaining students when finding areas of simple shapes and expressing answers to 2 decimal places; they understand the process of rounding answers. The lowest attaining-students, including those with special educational needs, undertake a variety of tasks to consolidate their understanding of number operations and to improve their basic skills. For example, they break numbers down into factors and find multiples. However, they have difficulty in memorising some multiplication tables and using multiplication squares to find answers, which slows down their progress. More able students, in both Years 10 and 11, attain highly. For example, students in a Year 10 class confidently use algebra to manipulate complex expressions and equations. The attainment of middle ability students is close to the national expectation for students of similar age. They can recognise the differences between the equations of straight and curved line graphs. A minority of these students use graphic calculators effectively to assist in the drawing of quadratic equations. The lowest-attaining students, including those with special educational needs, improve algebraic skills more slowly; they find the rules for multiplying positive and negative terms difficult to understand and remember. Students' attainment in the Year 9 National Curriculum tests and in GCSE is better than that observed in lessons. They are helped to do well in formal assessment through comprehensive revision programmes.

77. Teaching is good overall and students learn well. Lessons are carefully planned; they are well structured and maintain a pace which is in keeping with the students' capacity to learn. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject are good, enabling them to explain the work clearly and sequentially, so students understand and learn systematically. Students are well motivated and higher-attaining students, in particular, enjoy the challenge to succeed. Lessons are mostly well managed and this promotes good relationships, enabling all students to participate and be involved in the work of the lesson. In a Year 8 lesson, in which teaching was very good, students played a dice game to consider the fairness of the game and they suggested changes to improve the fairness. Students were enthused by the task, worked very well together and in their discussions made effective use of the subject vocabulary (such as combinations and justification); they made good progress. Occasionally, teachers do not sufficiently focus on the needs of all students. For example, in a Year 8 mixed ability class, students with special educational needs completed little work and made little progress. This was due to the work not being broken down into small enough steps to help them learn. This was identified as a weakness at the last inspection. The assessment of students' progress is carried out in accordance with the school's policy; students are tested each half-term. However, teachers are not consistent in the marking and recording of students' weekly class work and homework. Students would benefit from more informative marking to help them improve levels of attainment.
78. Students' attitudes to learning are mostly good; in a quarter of the lessons they are very good and unsatisfactory only occasionally. Students work well together in shared activities and in checking their work. They demonstrate confidence when explaining answers to the class. Students who attain highly are mature learners; they concentrate throughout the lessons and are highly motivated to succeed. Behaviour is good overall. A small minority of students can create disruption to others by calling out answers in class or questioning the teacher, either to draw attention to themselves or embarrass the teacher. This is usually handled sensitively by the teacher.
79. The leadership and management of the faculty are good. Teachers work well together and they all undertake some responsibility for the work of the faculty. They have a commitment to help students achieve as highly as possible. Activities that involve the use of computers have been integrated into the schemes of work, for example, the use of spreadsheets. A plan to improve the students' numeracy skills, including mental skills, has been developed but practice across the faculty is inconsistent. Monitoring needs to be more rigorous. The work of the faculty is regularly updated and improved but, due to difficulties in recruiting permanent and specialist teachers during last year, and some staff absence this term, documentation is not complete. There are plans to develop a structured approach to improving students' numeracy skills across the curriculum during this year. Improvement since the last report is satisfactory. The overall quality of teaching has improved as well as students' achievements. Computers are more regularly used.

## Numeracy

80. Standards of numeracy are above average, overall. Activities to strengthen numeracy skills feature in the mathematics scheme of work in Years 8 and 9. Within the mathematics faculty, there is consistent practice in developing students' written methods of calculation and the use of calculators, but not in opportunities to develop students' mental skills. Lowest-attaining students in all years have difficulty with some multiplication tables. By the end of Year 9, students use calculators competently. They are less competent in handling numbers mentally, for example, finding the square of numbers greater than 10. By the end of Year 11, higher-attaining students use number operations effectively in calculations which include symbols, for example, algebraic fractions. Lowest-attaining students improve their skills in handling number operations when expanding brackets. However, their retention skills are weak.
81. Although there is no strategy in place to develop systematically students' numeracy skills across the curriculum, the school has planned for some training for subject teachers this school year. Number and mathematical operations are used effectively in several subjects. Standards in science are good; tables are used to record results and graphs are drawn and interpreted. Charts and graphs are used satisfactorily in history. In information and communication technology, formulae are used effectively in spreadsheets and students are able to produce charts and graphs. Standards of numeracy are satisfactory in art: students have opportunities to develop and apply spatial concepts but they do not have enough opportunities to develop their skills in using scale and proportion. Statistical methods are used to good effect in coursework projects in geography. In design and technology, standards are satisfactory. Students use graphs effectively, especially in Year 11 coursework, and they use calculators appropriately when dividing rectangles into grid squares.

## SCIENCE

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

### Strengths

- Students achieve well in Years 10 and 11.
- Teachers build well on existing knowledge and capture interest by relating work to everyday applications.
- Students' work is well organised, allowing them to revise effectively.

### Areas for improvement

- Students in Years 8 and 9 are not challenged enough.
- Marking and setting of homework are inconsistent across the department.
- Assessment is not used effectively to identify and support underachieving students.

82. In 2000, the results of National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9 were above the national average and above the average in similar schools. The results in 2001 were better, though not as good as those in English and mathematics.

83. The overall proportion of Year 11 students gaining the higher (A\* - C) grades in GCSE examinations in 2000 was well above the average nationally and also well above the average in similar schools. Bearing in mind their National Curriculum test results two years earlier, students made very good progress. About one fifth took examinations in biology, chemistry and physics while the rest took double-award science. Results in the separate science subjects were above national averages, while those in double-award science were close to the national average. Although the results in 2001 were lower overall, they are still likely to be above average. Students did less well in the separate sciences, mainly because temporary teachers replaced staff who were absent and they lacked appropriate specialist expertise. The results were lower than those in English and mathematics.

84. When students enter the school in Year 8, their attainment is average. They make satisfactory progress and by Year 9 their attainment in lessons is similar to that expected for their age. This is lower than in recent National Curriculum tests and is lower than it should be, because lessons do not always provide appropriate challenge for all students. For example, in a Year 9 lesson observed, learning was only just satisfactory because most students already knew that chemical equations show how reactants are transformed into products; although they consolidated their learning they did not carry it further forward.

85. Students' achievement is better in Years 10 and 11 and they make good progress. Their attainment in the lessons observed in Year 11 was above average, reflecting results in recent GCSE examinations. About one tenth of students demonstrate excellent background knowledge, for example, when they describe the effects of gravity and friction on a spacecraft or speculate about the possibility of life on other planets. More than half demonstrate above average attainment when they explain why the concentration of an acid affects the rate at which it reacts and how human characteristics and some diseases are inherited. However, students' skills in carrying out investigations are not well developed; they have too few opportunities to predict outcomes and use experimental results to draw out conclusions, partly because three of the laboratories are unsuitable for the full range of practical work and are in urgent need of refurbishment. Students with special educational needs make similar progress to others, but the progress of some of those learning to speak English is inhibited because they do not have enough support in learning the technical language of science.

86. Teachers help students to develop their communication skills by correcting their spelling, punctuation and grammar during marking and emphasising the meanings of key scientific words. Emphasis on thinking skills, which help students to handle information and ideas, is well used in some lessons. Students' numerical skills are developed as they are needed: for example, in Year 11 they are helped to draw and interpret graphs to show the relationship

between speed and time as a car accelerates. However, their skills in using information and communication technology are not well developed because there are too few computers located in the department.



87. Overall, teaching and learning are not good enough in Years 8 and 9, yet good in Years 10 and 11. The main reason for this difference is that teachers new to the school are deployed to teach mainly in Years 8 and 9. They find difficulty in coping with mixed ability classes in these years because they do not have detailed information about the prior attainments of students in their classes and the range of supporting learning materials available to them is too limited. About one in five of the lessons seen during the inspection was unsatisfactory, and this is too many. However, in nearly half the lessons seen teaching and learning were good or better; in a few lessons in Years 10 and 11 they were very good, and occasionally excellent. The key features of good teaching that help students make good progress are consolidation of earlier learning before building upon it, using everyday examples or important applications to capture interest, and presenting work at a good pace that is not too demanding for those who work more slowly. In an excellent lesson in Year 11, the teacher first organised students into pairs to discuss what they already knew about the mole concept, and then referred to its importance in chemical industry, in calculating how much starting material to use for the required amount of a product. Students rapidly understood the importance of the work and learnt how to apply the idea in calculating how much copper sulphate they could make from a given amount of copper oxide. They went on to prepare a sample of the substance, to test their predictions. In Years 8 and 9, teaching and learning are less good and sometimes unsatisfactory because teachers have not planned clear learning outcomes for their lessons and teaching strategies do not take into account the full range of students' abilities. In a Year 9 lesson about the periodic table of elements, chemical symbols and word equations, the purpose was unclear and students learnt less than they should have done. The lesson lacked pace and required little thought for the great majority of students because they copied examples of word equations from the board rather than learning how to construct them for themselves. In another lesson, students spent too much time colouring in a pamphlet about the ozone layer and too little thinking about the science involved. Marking of students' written work is mostly up to date but teachers' comments do not usually focus clearly enough on learning targets to help them improve their science. Some teachers do not set regular homework tasks to extend and consolidate learning from lessons.
88. Students mostly behave well and concentrate on their work. Their concentration lapses when tasks are too easy, but this rarely leads to disruption of the work of others. Students' exercise books are well presented and well organised, resulting in a clear record of their work that allows effective revision.
89. Weaknesses in the leadership and management of the department have been recognised and recent changes are addressing them. A largely new team of teachers, supported by new leadership (assistant headteacher), has the capacity to bring about improvement in teaching and learning in Years 8 and 9. The department is establishing a database for recording assessment information but this is not yet used to identify and support underachieving students. Schemes of work suggest too much repetition of work already covered by middle schools and make too little reference to appropriate support material that would help teachers plan their lessons effectively. The laboratory technicians work hard in providing a service that supports learning. At the inspection there were not enough technicians, which caused some equipment to arrive late and delay the start of lessons. (Technician support was augmented immediately after the inspection.)
90. Not enough improvement has been made since the last inspection. Teaching then was mainly satisfactory or better, and now it is unsatisfactory in Years 8 and 9. At the last inspection expectations were too low in Years 8 and 9, students' investigative skills had potential for improvement, and too little notice was taken of students' prior learning in middle schools; these deficiencies still remain. Examination results are similar to those at the time of the last inspection.

## ART AND DESIGN

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

### Strengths

- High standards are achieved in art, in all years.
- Curricular planning is well focused on requirements and helps students to learn systematically.
- Students' enthusiasm and commitment are conveyed well in their work and in their progress.
- Dynamic leadership and management are supported by good teamwork.

### Areas for improvement

- Enrichment through using a greater variety of two and three-dimensional media.
- Sharing assessment information with students, including National Curriculum levels and descriptors.

91. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is overall above the national expectation. Girls do better than boys, as nationally. Progress through Years 8 and 9 is good. GCSE results are well above the national average: results in art are among the best in the school. In 2000, 95 per cent of students gained the higher grades (A\*-C) and a third gained the highest grades (A\*, A). Results in 2001, while not quite as good, are still well above average. Girls do better than boys, but the difference is less than nationally (boys gain few high grades).
92. Across Years 8 and 9, students develop a good understanding of the art elements - line, shape, pattern, tone, form, colour and texture - and they use this knowledge to develop original work in a wide range of painting and drawing media. Side-by-side with their practical activities, they study the work and styles of major artists, and the aims of art movements. Year 9 students, for example, showed well above average knowledge of Surrealism during class discussion and constructed exciting spider diagrams, demonstrating understanding of how the movement developed, the major artists involved and their main objectives. They develop their own work using similar approaches. Many had researched the topic for homework, using the Internet. Year 8 students also research and use information and communication technology to assist their progress. For example, they used computer-aided design to improve their understanding of line-form in drawing a still life, before adding tone and colour. Their work showed good knowledge of the software and understanding of balance and composition.
93. Current achievement in Years 10 and 11 is high. Work is well researched and based on the integration of students' own ideas and the styles, aims, objectives and work of chosen major artists (mainly from the nineteenth century to present day). Much work has rich pattern quality, and is very expressive - sketchbooks are of high quality and tell a visual story of the exploration of media, themes and processes. The low-relief work by Year 10 students is strikingly effective and shows that students can use colours and shapes to convey mood and meaning. Their understanding of spatial relationships and objects in perspective is also good.
94. Students confidently follow a process of exploration, discovery, and documentation. Personal studies and study skills are very good. Assignments are approached with enthusiasm and commitment, resulting in high productivity. Relationships are very good and students draw on their own cultural backgrounds and interests to give their work originality and verve; personal styles are emerging.
95. Teaching is predominantly good, often very good, and never less than satisfactory. Teachers have very good command of the subject and they communicate their ideas well, using personal skills and interests effectively. For example, expert knowledge of a leading computer-aided design package enables adjustments to be made so that tasks are appropriate for students of all abilities. Teachers use a range of strategies and classroom management is good. They are well respected for their firm but fair approach and their pleasant class room manner. Students trust their teachers, knowing that they will be helped to achieve their full potential. Curricular planning is a strength, and examination requirements and assessment criteria are carefully addressed. However, there is scope for greater diversity - to extend opportunities in two and three-dimensional media, through print making, or digital photography, for example. Although literacy and numeracy feature largely in the department's work, some good opportunities are missed to point out links and promote further paths of learning for students, for example, through documenting research.
96. Improvements since the last inspection are good, overall, although still more direct observational drawing is needed. GCSE results are consistently very good. Record-keeping has improved. The team approach has eliminated inconsistencies in teaching, but further improvement could be

made in the use of National Curriculum levels and sharing of information, including level descriptors, with students. Strengthening of provision for the gifted and talented and greater integration with work in other arts subjects could lift attainment yet further.

97. The department is well led and managed; there are exciting development plans to extend information and communication technology facilities and to improve accommodation. Teamwork is a strength, enabling expertise to be shared and exciting projects to be developed. Links with other local schools and the art curriculum group are beneficial in promoting high standards. Links with local industries, further education establishments and art colleges could be further developed.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- Achievement in food technology and child development.
- The system for monitoring and assessment of progress is good, particularly in Years 8 and 9.
- Provision of equipment for information and communication technology.
- Excellent documentation, including the scheme of work, which meets most of the National Curriculum requirements.
- Good teamwork among staff, who are very well led and managed.

### Areas for improvement

- Examination results in resistant materials and electronics, which are much weaker than in other areas.
- Weaknesses in teaching, to bring all up to the best.
- The range of materials used in resistant materials, which is limited.
- One room which is in very poor condition, and two others which are not conducive to good design and technology teaching.

98. Standards of work in design and technology are above average in Years 8 and 9, reflecting good achievement. GCSE results in 2000, across design and technology subjects, were above average overall, though they varied in specialist aspects. Results were well above average in food technology and child development, about average in textiles and graphics and below average in electronics and resistant materials. Overall, results were not as good in 2001, although likely still to be a little above the average nationally. Relative strengths and weaknesses in the department remained: results in food technology and child development were an improvement on previous years, textiles and graphics dropped significantly and results in electronics and resistant materials were well below those in other technology subjects. Results have fluctuated over the last four years. They have always been better than the national average, but there has not been a consistent rise or maintenance of a level of achievement. The causes of low achievement have been shortages of permanent teachers, some staff absence and difficulty in obtaining suitably qualified temporary teachers. A lack of effort and interest by some students, especially in resistant materials, has also contributed to poor results. In all years, the standards achieved by boys are below those of girls.
99. In Years 8 and 9, standards seen during the inspection were good, overall. In Year 9, very good work was seen in food technology where students were developing ideas for pastry-based products. Students were able to talk with confidence about their work and why different types of pastry were appropriate for different applications. Some good quality work was seen in a Year 9 textiles lesson, where students were able to use ideas effectively from different cultures, in the design of cushions. Aspects of literacy are being developed through the use of "word walls" where technical words are displayed. Some good examples of the use of information and communication technology was seen at both key stages, but its application to support designing and research, especially in Years 8 and 9, is limited. Computer-control, a National Curriculum requirement, is not incorporated in the scheme of work. Teachers are aware of those students who have special educational needs and take account of their needs in planning activities. The design and technology curriculum is accessible to all students in the school.
100. Similar variation in standards was evident in work seen in Years 10 and 11. Standards were good overall - very good in food, textiles and child development and satisfactory or good in graphics. While there is evidence of some improvement in electronics, standards in resistant materials remain average, at best, and sometimes poor, mainly due to lack of effort and interest by a significant number of students. Most Year 11 students are making good progress with their course

work projects. Some excellent food technology work was seen, produced by students in both Years 10 and 11. The electronics group are generating useful ideas for projects and were able to talk with confidence about the work and the function of components within their circuits. Both Year 10 graphics groups were achieving good results in perspective drawing.

101. In work seen at the inspection, there was evidence of an improvement in the quality of planning in design folders of most students in Year 11. Teacher Assessments at the end of Year 9 show above average achievement, overall. Students' good progress across Years 8 and 9 is likely to be maintained, given the good quality of teaching in the subject as a whole.
102. The quality of learning was good across Years 8 and 9 and generally satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. In three lessons, all in Years 10 and 11, the quality of learning was unsatisfactory, yet good lessons were also seen. The vast majority of students showed a very positive attitude to activities in lessons and to the subject as a whole. In many lessons there was a real desire to learn new things and to make progress. Students were able to identify clearly the objectives for the lesson and they responded positively to the teaching. Support staff provided good assistance for students with special educational needs and there was also effective use of technical staff in lessons.
103. The quality of teaching was also good in Years 8 and 9 and generally satisfactory in Years 10 and 11; good or very good teaching was seen in half the lessons observed. However, in three lessons teaching was unsatisfactory: weaknesses were mostly due to poor lesson planning and inadequate management of students who were disinclined to work. Students' learning was good where the standard of teaching was good. Characteristics of good teaching include careful preparation, a good range of teaching styles and activities, and effective use of time. Where teaching was good, objectives for lessons were clearly set out and made clear to the students, through writing them on the board. In the majority of lessons, students were managed well and high standards of work and behaviour were both set and achieved. The last inspection report referred to a generally unsatisfactory scheme of work, especially in food and resistant materials. Since then, the scheme of work has been totally re-written and meets most of the National Curriculum requirements. However, the range of materials used for resistant materials is limited: not enough use is made of plastics and metal. Computer-control does not currently feature in the scheme. A modular approach is used in Years 8 and 9, with students visiting all areas in turn. An effective system is in place to ensure that the teaching over a series of modules becomes progressively more challenging and aims at a higher level of achievement.
104. The faculty has established a very good system of assessment and recording. Teacher Assessment in Years 8 and 9 is accurate and the results of such assessments are recorded for future reference. Good use is made of assessment to inform subsequent teaching. Students are also encouraged to make their own assessment of their progress through the use of target sheets, which are included in design booklets and describe what they need to do to achieve a particular level. A system of monitoring the progress of examination groups is in place but the monitoring needs to be done more frequently in order to achieve an overall improvement in GCSE results. A firmer line needs to be taken with students who fail to complete aspects of course work.
105. Leadership is very good and the faculty is managed effectively, on the whole. The staff are well qualified and work well together as a team. A considerable amount of effort has been made by the head of faculty, in what have often been difficult circumstances with changes of staff, to establish very good systems and appropriate working practices, and to ensure that all staff use these. The present team of staff has many strengths and a number of the problems in attainment are due to the difficulties caused by poor teaching from staff who are no longer in the school and the difficulty of recruiting good temporary teachers to cover long-term absence. The needs of all students are considered and all have equal access to all aspects of the design and technology curriculum. The faculty has established good links with feeder middle schools. Some students from local schools come into food technology lessons as part of the Beacon school initiative and this arrangement helps to promote continuity.
106. Resources in the faculty are generally good, although much of the resistant materials equipment is underused. Whilst the range of information and communication technology provision is good, most of the resources are located in one room and consideration should be given to locating computers in other rooms in order to allow computer technology to be integrated into designing and making. The last inspection report expressed concerns about the condition of food technology rooms. Whilst one room has been refurbished to a good standard, the other room is in a very poor condition and reflects badly on the faculty and the school as a whole. It is clearly impossible to establish and maintain in this room the standards of hygiene which are required for a food preparation area. Two of the workshops are not laid out in the most effective manner. A good

level of technician support is provided. Arrangements for health and safety are good in many respects. All equipment and machines are guarded and students are instructed to wear aprons and to use eye protection. However, almost all of the teaching groups exceed 20 in number. Since all rooms have been designed and equipped for a maximum of 20 students and, with one exception, the rooms are rather small, such overcrowding presents a significant hazard.

## DRAMA

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

### Strengths

- Results, which are improving, especially those achieved by boys.
- Very good, knowledgeable and energetic teaching of students in Years 10 and 11.
- Good opportunities to contribute to students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.
- The quality and range of extra-curricular activities.
- Very good leadership and management by the head of department.

### Areas for improvement

- Planning for lessons in Years 8 and 9, to bring all teaching up to the best.
- The match of accommodation used with lesson activities in drama lessons.

107. Standards of work seen during the inspection were satisfactory for students in Years 8 and 9 and good for students in Years 10 and 11. Students' prior attainment (gained in their middle schools) is very limited; some come to Nower Hill with no knowledge of drama. Until this year there were no drama lessons for students in Year 9. Taking these factors together, the progress made by students up to the age of sixteen is very good. The timetable this year for students in Year 9 includes drama for the first time. Attainment seen during the inspection for students in Years 8 and 9 was in line with expectations, although it reflects a range of attainment. The best attainment is linked to good teaching, where students work hard throughout lessons and develop their skills, knowledge and understanding through well-paced, challenging activities suited to their needs. Students of all abilities make good progress in lessons that are well taught.
108. The GCSE results achieved by both boys and girls in 2000 were in line with national expectations after a slight dip in results in 1999. There was a significant rise in the higher (A\*-C) grades achieved in 2001 results. Boys achieved a gain of nearly 16 per cent to bring their results in line with national expectations. Girls continue to outperform boys in numbers of higher grades achieved. However, one boy achieved the top grade. Students continue to achieve well in drama compared with their results in other subjects. In lessons, attainment is higher where students' knowledge, skills and understanding are linked. For example, in a very well taught Year 11 lesson the teacher used a poem written to portray the oppression in Germany during the 1930's. Students were able to use their knowledge of this period of history in order to produce carefully-designed actions. The teacher also introduced a piece of music to enhance the dramatic tension created by the use of freeze-frames. During the evaluation at the end of the lesson a student recalled how a similar device was used in the film *Jaws*. Students made very good progress.
109. The teaching, overall, is good for students in Years 8 and 9 and very good for those in Years 10 and 11. The strengths in teaching are linked to students' learning. The most successful teaching for students is characterised by good challenge, with tasks well explained and students enthused to improve and develop their work. Lessons are well paced and the teachers bring awareness of stagecraft and theatre into their lessons. Appropriate use of personal experiences help lessons come alive and release the dramatic possibilities. The teaching for examination classes is linked closely to the examination requirements. Lessons are well planned with very good intervention and resources to ensure students practise dramatic devices and use them in a variety of situations. Students are encouraged to think for themselves. Teaching encourages very good independent learning and this is reinforced by appropriate homework that is thoughtfully planned in order to develop work done in class. The marking is always good and informative, ensuring that students know how to make progress and improve their work. Weaknesses in teaching occur occasionally when the tasks set and the time span given are not crisp enough to ensure that all students learn successfully. Occasionally, younger students are given too much freedom, their attention flags and noise levels become too high. In these instances, lesson planning has not taken enough account of the overall purpose of the lesson and the use of available accommodation.

110. The drama department is a hive of activity at lunch times and after school. The enthusiasm and commitment shown by the staff means that students have a good variety of extra-curricular activities. These have been carefully designed to support and develop attainment. Opportunities to work with outside agencies and use the local amenities are well organised. Students are expected and are able to use the studio for rehearsals between lessons, which maximises their opportunities to improve. Relationships are very good and students are proud of their work. They enjoy drama lessons and have clear and positive reasons for choosing to study drama beyond the age of 14. Students know that skills learnt in lessons help their overall confidence, their oral work is improved and they can be more self-confident when asked to read aloud.
111. The department is fortunate to have a very strong and effective head of department. She has a clear understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the department, having undertaken a thorough and comprehensive audit, in preparation for Artsmark status. The accommodation is good, enabling students to work in a variety of settings. However, the smaller studio is not always used to best effect by some classes. Resources are very good and help to reflect the personal and social themes taught in other lessons. They give good opportunities for cultural, racial and moral issues to be explored in a relaxed and sympathetic atmosphere. Such elements are central to the work of the drama department and give very good opportunity to cultivate and support students' personal development. Video use and continual evaluation and monitoring of work mean that the use of assessment is very good. The lessons taught to Years 8 and 9 have been planned and written very well and enable progress to be checked for each student. They give drama a clear rationale and enable students' achievements to be demonstrated clearly. The department has improved well since the last inspection and offers students many opportunities to develop their interest in and understanding of drama.

## GEOGRAPHY

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

### Strengths

- Results, which are good at GCSE.
- The good progress which students make.
- The attitudes, behaviour and expectations of the students, which are good.
- Teachers manage students well and have much experience.

### Areas for improvement

- The match of tasks and learning resources to the needs of all.
- The development of basic geographical skills, including map-reading, in Years 8 and 9.
- The use of assessment to analyse attainment and involve students more closely in identifying their own strengths and eradicating weaknesses.
- The systematic development of literacy, numeracy and information and communication technology skills.

112. Attainment in geography on entry to the school is broadly average, except for weaknesses in the knowledge of places and in the recognition of geographical patterns. By the end of Year 9, attainment assessed by teachers in 2001 was well above national expectations. Attainment, seen in lessons and in the scrutiny of exercise books at the start of Year 9, was above average. Students achieve well across Years 8 and 9.
113. GCSE results have been well above the national average for three years up to 2000. In 2001, while not quite so good, they were still above average and one third of students gained the highest (A\*, A) grades. Students achieve better results in geography (relative to standards at the end of Year 9) than in most schools nationally and perform better in geography than in most of their other subjects. In 2001, high ability students achieved well but less able students did not do as well as expected. Three classes were disadvantaged because of a change of teacher after Christmas in their examination year; nevertheless, the group added better value than in just over half of the schools nationally. Standards observed at the inspection were above average. The GCSE course is very well organised with a heavy emphasis on the skills needed to pass the examination. Students are provided with good, detailed revision notes and willingly attend revision classes in very large numbers after school on Friday.
114. Attainment at the end of Year 9 is above national expectations. In lessons observed at the start of Year 9, students understood and could classify geographical information, for example, about the

course of a river. They recalled earlier work and picked out physical features to explain differences in the rate of flow. Similarly, in lessons about earthquakes they showed good comprehension of information and accounted for the cause and effect of earthquakes using technical language. In Year 11 lessons, some variation in standards was observed. Students showed some lack of confidence in using standard signs on Ordnance Survey maps. On the other hand, when considering factors influencing the location of a factory they achieved very well. They marshalled well-reasoned arguments to support their views and made effective use of technical language. The teaching of basic skills is not systematically planned. The department borrows from skills already learned, rather than consciously supporting their further development; there is, however, some good use of word-frames to assemble and classify information and students are required to write personally and empathetically as well as in the style of a report. Oral work is good in Years 10 and 11 and the best students in Year 11 can sustain well a logical argument. Numeracy skills are called upon daily, as in a Year 8 lesson analysing climate information - they made effective use of averages and could calculate ranges. Some teachers plan to use information and communication technology; others do not yet have the skills to do so because they have not yet received training. Students show that they can use word and data-processing in their homework but cannot always use them in geography lessons.

115. Teaching and learning are good. All lessons are effectively planned and clear objectives are set. Methods ensure effective learning and a good variety of materials is used. Tape-recordings are effectively used and well chosen video clips stimulate reactions of wonder at the awesome power of nature. Good examples were seen in a Year 8 lesson on Brazil and a Year 9 lesson on earthquakes: the videos brought the topics to life and helped the students to progress well. Most of the teaching challenges students to think and to use what they know and understand to answer questions and solve problems. Students have constant access to the higher levels of the National Curriculum and can extend their learning. Teachers have high expectations of work and behaviour and students, equally, expect to be well taught. Generally, the expectations of both are met. Teaching is delivered at a good pace, strongly directed by the teacher; timed targets are set; students are well managed and are usually kept too busy to misbehave. In any case, students are good learners: they listen carefully, mostly follow instructions and aid the progress of their learning by joining in and by sharing what they know and understand. Laughter is frequent and learning is fun. Relationships are very good: teachers know their students well and students trust them to help them do well.
116. The use of assessment data is at an early stage: students are just beginning to measure their own learning so that they can know their strengths and work on their weaknesses. Teachers' knowledge of National Curriculum levels is secure but some of the marking schemes in Years 8 and 9 need revising. Teachers' good accurate assessment at GCSE is crucial for the examination course. Throughout geography, assessment is not used as sharply as it could be to drive up standards further. Many learning resources are available in the department to match the learning needs of all students. While there is good practice in their use, not all teachers use them well enough that all students can work at their own level and pace in all lessons.
117. Team spirit is strong among the teachers. The department is unusual: the head of the department is part-time; one teacher is a full-time geographer and five other staff teach a little geography. Almost half of the lessons in Years 8 and 9 are taught by non-specialists, although subject specialists teach all of the GCSE work. Results are good because of skilled teaching to examination criteria on the GCSE course and because all of the teachers are strong classroom managers. The head of department gives good support with advice and teaching materials so that there are no day-to-day problems. Over time, inconsistencies lead to some alarming gaps in geographical skills, for example, in the knowledge of conventional signs of the Ordnance Survey at the beginning of Year 11. The subject specialists are good geographers who organise their explanations and materials well so that students can deepen their knowledge and understanding.
118. Leadership and management are good. Humanities rooms cluster on one corridor with a team room, which together provide a good subject base. Whilst resources for learning are satisfactory overall, there remains a need for a core textbook for Years 8 and 9. There is a shortage of computers. The head of department works hard to keep her team together, has maintained good standards since the last inspection and is sharply aware of what needs to be done to improve the teaching of geography and to raise standards even higher.

## HISTORY

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

#### Strengths

- GCSE results which are above average.
- The good progress students make, which results from good teaching.
- Students are keen to learn.

#### Areas for improvement

- Not enough use is made of information and communication technology.
- Opportunities for extended writing are too limited in Years 8 and 9.

119. At the end of Year 9, standards in lessons and work seen are above national expectations. Teacher Assessments for the last two years confirm this, but show the gap between boys and girls: the achievement of girls is significantly higher than that of boys. Students have a good specialist vocabulary and accurate factual knowledge of the topics studied. In essays, they distinguish clearly between the short and long-term causes of the First World War. While a few good examples of formal essay writing were seen, including reports pleading for the abolition of slavery, these are relatively few: extended writing is underdeveloped. Little extensive personal research is included in accounts. In lessons, boys are enthusiastic about oral work but are more reluctant to write than girls. However, the progress of both boys and girls is good. The good standards evident at the last inspection have been maintained.
120. GCSE examination results have been consistently above average since 1999 and were better in 2000 than in 2001 when the proportion of students gaining the highest (A\*, A) grades was well above average. Students achieve better results in history than in most of their other subjects. Since the last inspection, the department has worked to close the gap between boys' and girls' results and has succeeded. In 2000, boys' results, when their individual abilities are considered, were a little better than those of the girls. Skills acquired in Years 8 and 9 are progressively developed in Years 10 and 11. By the time they reach Year 11, students are working at above average standards in lessons. The foundation is the good knowledge which students recall and apply. In one lesson, they grasped the concept of 'lebensraum' easily because they knew Hitler wished to expand German territory. They are used to questioning sources and linking the evidence to their own knowledge. In general, students write fluently and are highly motivated, so coursework is completed well. All students progress well, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language.
121. Most of the teaching is good and in some lessons it is very good. Subject knowledge is good and well used in questioning. Teachers insist on detailed answers. When asking a student whom Serbia might count on as an ally, the teacher was not satisfied with the simple answer of 'Russia', but pushed the student to explain that Russia wanted access to the Mediterranean Sea. Relationships with students are strong. In lessons, they expect students to listen carefully and to follow instructions. In return, they know students well and do their best to help individuals. Students are encouraged not only to ask questions but also to challenge evidence. Boys, in particular, respond to this approach. Teachers use a wide variety of activities. For example, they have made their own 'Radio News' reporting the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, based on eyewitness accounts. Such an activity, together with the use of video and role-play, interests students and deepens their learning. Good attention to vocabulary helps students who are learning English as an additional language. The variety of methods used in lessons and effective use of support teachers contribute to the progress of students with special educational needs. Homework was set regularly during inspection week, but a few students did not complete it or were late in doing so.



122. Teamwork is an important factor in the standards achieved. The head of department and staff work hard to uphold standards. Expectations are clear and consistent. Issues, such as the raising of boys' attainment, have been systematically addressed. The department has contributed to establishing the integrated humanities GCSE course, which is well suited to students' interests. At the moment, there are not enough opportunities to use information and communication technology extensively in class. Students in Years 8 and 9 have limited experience in extended writing and research.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

The inspection of information and communication technology included lesson visits and the analysis of students' work in information and communication technology lessons and review of contributions made in all their subjects. Work was also sampled in the related subject - business studies - in which standards are good. This well-organised course is provided for students in Years 10 and 11. They achieve well. GCSE results are a little above the national average and both boys and girls achieve results which are better than in most of their other subjects. In lessons, students show good reasoning skills and a secure understanding of business principles. Teaching and learning are good.

Overall, the quality of provision in information and communication technology **across Years 8 and 9 is satisfactory**, but is **unsatisfactory through Years 10 and 11**.

### Strengths

- The expertise and enthusiasm of teachers to raise standards in the subject.
- Teaching and learning, which are good.
- Students' positive attitudes and commitment to the subject.
- Recent development planning and improvements to meet students' needs.

### Areas for improvement

- Involvement of all subjects in teaching the subject so that National Curriculum requirements are met in Years 10 and 11.
- The co-ordination, monitoring and assessment of information and communication technology across the school, making greater use of the National Curriculum levels and assessment criteria.
- Improvement in examination results.

123. In recent years, the standard of work of students in Year 8 and 9 has been below that expected. Now that the school has made improvements in staffing, resourcing and accommodation, and provided separate information and communication technology lessons in both years, good progress is being made. Almost all students are autonomous users of computers; they access their own files and are developing a sound knowledge of the major applications provided by the school's network. They also use the Internet for research - for example, in Year 8, students investigate weather patterns in a city of their choice, learn how to calculate average temperatures and present their findings using a spreadsheet. Students understand that the computer can be a powerful tool, and are keen to develop their skills. Current work indicates satisfactory standards: the majority of students should reach or exceed national expectations by the end of Year 9.
124. The most recent GCSE results (2001) were below average and not as good as in 2000, when they were above average. Staffing difficulties during the 2000-2001 school year contributed to this dip in results. Course-work is a significant element of examination work and good progress is evident in GCSE students' work in both Years 10 and 11. Year 10 students, in developing an understanding of analysis, discuss how the application of information and communication technology could assist in the smooth running of a school sports day. They word-process a list of the desired outcomes and performance criteria, for each of the actions they identify. Overall, their work reaches a satisfactory standard, with the more able demonstrating that they understand some difficult concepts. Year 11 coursework shows a wide range of achievement - the best work showing very good knowledge of database applications and illustration of corporate identity, whilst weaker work is poorly presented with unnecessary enhancements and incomplete evaluation. The attainment of those who have chosen not to study information and communication technology for examinations is variable and difficult to ascertain, as there is no systematic approach to developing skills and assessing capability across the curriculum. The use of information and communication technology applications in other subject areas is not planned and recorded systematically. Inspection evidence shows that computers are not used enough in other subjects. Overall, attainment is below that expected.

125. In information and communication technology lessons, teaching is predominantly good, sometimes very good and never less than satisfactory. Teachers have very good command of the subject and are fully conversant with the school's network and high quality software. They plan extremely well, with topics designed to motivate and challenge students. Most tasks are open-ended, with extension work for the more able, for example, to create the front page of a new newspaper for a specific audience. Teachers take account of individual needs and know their students well; questioning, verbal comments and work sheets are adjusted accordingly. Class management and activities are good and enable students to learn at a good pace. Effective use is made of computer-projection, for presenting topics and demonstrating commands, menus and applications to the whole class.
126. Literacy and numeracy are generally well integrated, although sometimes more paperwork and calculations would assist understanding and reinforce learning. Support teachers would be beneficial in some classes in all years, in order to allow teachers more time to give in-depth evaluation and analysis of work in progress for those who need it. The new schemes of work cover the National Curriculum requirements in Years 8 and 9. Unfortunately, there are no separate information and communication technology lessons for upper school students who do not take the information and communication technology examinations (approximately two-thirds of Years 10 and 11). Opportunities are very variable: initiatives are very good in several subjects - especially in art and design and technology - but many subjects do not have adequate computer resources and there are limitations on the booking of computer rooms. Most students in Years 10 and 11 are not taught in sufficient breadth or depth for National Curriculum requirements to be met.
127. Nearly all students have tremendous enthusiasm for the subject. Their attitudes are very positive. They recognise how information and communication technology can be used to help them in a variety of ways - for example, to enhance presentation, for research and to communicate ideas. They use a range of applications and the Internet, at lunchtime and after school, in the library and computer rooms.
128. Improvement since the last inspection has been too limited - the school has not kept up with improvements made in many other schools. However, there is now clear and strong direction by an assistant headteacher for developing the subject across the school. The improved resourcing, co-ordination and management structure is starting to raise standards. Innovative plans are in place to implement fully the National Curriculum and develop the use of information and communication technology in subject areas. Plans include regular meetings and training for subject representatives; the development and monitoring of assessment; the use of self-assessment and relating attainment to National Curriculum levels and level descriptors. The department is considering the introduction of externally accredited courses as alternatives to GCSE, which could more closely match students' prior attainment and needs. Emphasis on raising standards and making information and communication technology useful to all students, whatever their individual requirements, is strong.

## LATIN AND CLASSICS

Overall, the quality of provision in Latin and classics is **good**.

### Strengths

- Students progress well and achieve good standards.
- Students develop a broad understanding of classical times as well as expertise in Latin.
- Teachers have very good knowledge of their students, very competent grasp of the subjects and take great pains over their pronunciation of Latin, providing an excellent model for students.
- The course followed and the exceptionally good extra-curricular programme provide much variety and interest.

### Area for improvement

- Boys do not achieve as well as girls in examinations.

129. The standards attained by Year 8 students are good, as are those by students in Year 11. Younger students have a good knowledge of Greek and Roman mythology as well as life in classical times. GCSE students have good strategies for translating Latin verse, as well as a growing awareness of literary devices. Results in GCSE are above average for students taking classics and average for those sitting Latin. Since the last inspection standards have been maintained, although the fluctuating numbers in small groups mean that it is difficult to identify significant trends.

However, results are broadly in line with those seen nationally in similar schools. There is no significant difference in the attainment of ethnic groups, although the performance of girls in both classical studies and Latin is better than that of boys. The school is aware of this and is reviewing materials to try to help boys do better.

130. Students make good progress in classics and each year group has a good range of material to study. The last inspection report mentioned the need to include more material about the ancient Greeks and this has now been done. Students who opt for Latin make rapid progress in Year 9 and by the beginning of Year 10 have a competent grasp of many of the grammatical features. The use of a commercial multi-media course, which the department is piloting as part of a national trial, has been very fruitful. It helps teachers to use the time allotted to the subject to good advantage and stimulates students' interest. The teaching for GCSE moves students on to an appreciation of the literary values of Roman authors and more able students are able to identify features which Latin authors use to heighten poetic and other effects. Students with special educational needs and English as an additional language have appropriate support to ensure that they make satisfactory progress.
131. Students like Latin and in Year 9 over 40 per cent choose it as one of their options. The GCSE courses consistently attract a worthwhile number of students, and the department does well to teach both Latin and classics within the constraints of a single subject timetable. The head of the classics department has forged links with her counterpart at Harrow School and some students continue the study of the subject for A-level there, as there are now no schools in the immediate district which offer this opportunity. Students are responsive in lessons and enjoy the work set for them. They work together in groups or pairs in a purposeful manner and listen attentively. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their students and use this to combine them effectively in group work. They show respect for students and this helps to foster a sense of self-esteem.
132. Teaching was good or better in the majority of lessons seen and satisfactory in all others. Teachers have a very competent grasp of the subject matter and an obvious enthusiasm that stimulates students. Particularly impressive is the way that the teachers take great pains over their pronunciation of Latin and this provides an excellent model for students, many of whom endeavour to improve their own spoken Latin. Lessons are planned well and teachers have high expectations of all students, although sometimes more able students need more challenge. Teachers use questioning well and are able to diagnose speedily if any point has not been understood, and adapt the lesson accordingly. They use a variety of methods, which helps students maintain their interest and productivity. Written work is set regularly and marked in a way that affirms achievement and is helpful for further progress.
133. The strong place that this subject holds in the school is an encouraging sign of the breadth and balance of the curriculum. The subject matter, of both the Latin and classics courses, is aimed at giving a rounded picture of the classical world. Teachers take pains to emphasise links with English and other modern languages, as well as other cross-cultural links. The school has been chosen to pilot a commercial multi-media program and this is an invaluable resource for Year 9 students and teachers. Extra-curricular visits and activities are exceptionally good: they both raise awareness of the subject and enrich the curriculum. The head of department manages the subject well. It reflects the aims of the school, as well as contributing satisfactorily to the social, moral and cultural development of students.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

### Strengths

- Attainment in French at the end of Years 9 and 11 is above average.
- Students make good progress in both French and German, especially in Years 10 and 11.
- Students' attitudes to learning a modern foreign language are generally positive. Good behaviour also helps them to learn well.
- Teaching is good and promotes effective learning.
- Leadership and management are strong. The department analyses its results and amends teaching plans as a result: improvement since the last inspection is good.

### Areas for improvement

- Consistent use by teachers of French and German in the conduct of lessons and to improve students' use of the foreign language.

- Use of reading schemes and new technology to broaden students' learning experiences.
- Use of assessment information to improve students' understanding of what they need to do to improve.

134. Teachers' Assessments of students' attainment at the end of Year 9, largely based on work in French, show standards to be above national expectations, especially at the higher levels. The trend of improvement is rising faster than nationally. Girls do better than boys; the difference is similar to that nationally. At the end of Year 11, attainment in French, as shown by results at higher grades (A\* - C) in GCSE examinations is above the national average. Results in 2001 were not quite as good as in 2000, but still above the national average. Results for both boys and girls are above their respective national averages, though the gap between girls' results, which are better than boys', is slightly greater than nationally. Results for a much smaller number of students entered for German also dipped in 2001, and remain below the national average. In German, girls' results are better than boys', by a much greater margin than found nationally. Boys' results are well below the national average for boys, whilst girls attain about as well as girls nationally. Results across the full range of grades (A\* - G), are slightly below the national average, suggesting that some lower-attaining students do not attain as well as they should, though a small number gain a certificate of achievement. On the other hand, above average attainment in French at the highest grades, (A\*, A), indicates that gifted linguists are reaching their potential. Though there is a falling trend in both languages, results in 2001 were affected by considerable lack of continuity in teaching when students were in Year 10. Students' performance in French in 2000 was as good as their performance in most other subjects.
135. Evidence from lessons and work seen at the inspection confirm Teachers' Assessments at the end of Year 9. Students are in line to achieve above national expectations. Students arrive from middle schools with a variety of experiences and standards in French. The majority have lower standards than expected at the end of Year 7. They make good progress in Years 8 and 9 in French, with satisfactory progress in German. Strong emphasis on learning language rules and vocabulary systematically improve students' ability to understand what they hear and read in the foreign language. Higher-attaining students write accurately and at good length by the end of Year 9. They progress from writing simple descriptions to giving accounts of past holidays. Other students write more briefly on similar topics, sometimes to a model. They describe themselves, their family, home and local area, sometimes in letters to imaginary pen-friends. Oral standards are comparatively weaker, despite much investment of lesson time in speaking tasks. As a result, students exchange four or five utterances, usually in structured role-plays, but lack confidence when not supported. Pronunciation is good in French, although weaker in German, where lower-attaining students, in particular, have difficulties with consonants, which they anglicise. Within groups which represent the full range of ability, students with special educational needs make satisfactory progress, which is accelerated where they receive specialist support.
136. Progress is good in both languages in Years 10 and 11. Students taking GCSE in 2001 added a good deal of value, based on Teacher Assessments for them at the end of Year 9. In lessons seen in Years 10 and 11, and in other work seen, there is evidence that standards exceed those indicated by GCSE results in 2001, especially for the large number of students in high ability groups: overall, standards are above average and better in French than German. Good teaching, which includes effective advice on how to access higher examination marks, helps students to prepare well for GCSE by improving all their language skills. Though speaking is still the weakest skill, there are signs of improvement as students learn to extend role-play into genuine conversation. Pronunciation is generally good, though intonation can be flat, especially where students speak material which they have memorised. Comprehension skills continue to improve as students learn through new topic areas and consolidate and extend topics studied previously. They understand the meaning of increasingly long and complex passages in spoken and written language. Standards of writing are improved by preparation for coursework and written preparation for oral presentations. Students write in a variety of styles and a range of tenses to plan holidays, give accounts of recent holidays and work experience, discuss personal fitness and make a job application. Higher-attaining students achieve an impressive degree of sophistication in their writing as they experiment with language. Others often manage work of similar length, as they follow good models, but make more errors, which can sometimes hinder communication. Some students with special educational needs do not study a modern foreign language in Years 10 and 11, whilst others make satisfactory progress towards modified targets in appropriate sets.
137. The quality of teaching and learning is good, in all years and in both French and German. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. Three teachers are native speakers of French, and six out of seven teach both French and German. Where they use the foreign language consistently to conduct lessons, as observed in a Year 9 French lesson on daily routines, students progress well:

expectations of them are higher and they imitate the good role-model. Unfortunately, too much English is used in many lessons, often unnecessarily, which lessens the impact of teachers' subject expertise and prevents teaching from being even better. Significantly, students never use the foreign language spontaneously, as lessons give little opportunity, and they are not expected to do this. Expectations are not high enough in this area of learning in the early stages of language development. Teaching of basic skills is weak at the moment, despite the subject's contribution to improving standards in literacy skills, but planned improvements in the use of information and communication technology will improve provision in this area. Teachers plan their lessons well to cover other aspects of language development, so that students receive a good grounding in language rules and have regular opportunities to apply and consolidate knowledge. In the best lessons, students engage in a range of tasks, covering different skills, and they enjoy learning through imaginative and stimulating activities. In a Year 11 German lesson, practice of GCSE role-plays was done as a team game, in which students learned to evaluate the answers of others. A Year 10 German group of lower-attaining students participated in a carousel of brisk activities covering all four skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In such lessons, good planning leads to good progress in learning.

138. Teachers plan the composition of groups and target questions so that all students have opportunities to make contributions, especially in oral work. Students' attitudes vary in Year 8, especially as they feel the pressure of the hard work they have to do to catch up. In Years 9 to 11 attitudes are far more positive, as students realise the benefits of this hard work, and begin to enjoy the subject more as they become aware of their progress. Participation in extra oral sessions provided after school for students in Year 11 is very good. Allied to good behaviour in most lessons, these positive attitudes, well harnessed by teachers to produce strong relationships, lead to good progress in learning. Where occasional rude or unacceptable behaviour does occur, teachers have good strategies to ensure that it does not affect the progress of the group. Teaching methods are suitably varied, especially in lessons where teachers give students the chance to use language for themselves in pair or group work, which they stimulate with well-prepared resources. Time is always well used. Teachers make good use of overhead projectors, cassette players and textbooks, as well as providing a range of effective help and guidance sheets, as reference for future learning. Lack of computers and of time for reading restrict the range of students' learning experiences, though experiments with a new digital projector have the potential to diversify the nature of teaching and learning. The consistent application of the school's marking policy ensures that students understand their overall progress, but there is not enough use of helpful comments to help students understand the errors they make and how to overcome them. Homework is used effectively to consolidate and extend learning done in class in many cases, though some homework set for lower-attaining students is not demanding enough, either of time or effort.
139. Teaching and learning in French and German benefit from good leadership and management. This is particularly evident in the way the head of faculty has organised effective responses to criticisms made in the previous inspection report. Monitoring of standards is effective. The head of faculty and other teachers observe lessons and sample students' written work. Assessment procedures are sound, though sharing of assessment information with students does not have enough clarity and sharpness to effectively improve their learning, for instance, by individual target-setting. On the other hand, the faculty analyses data well and responds by amending the content and pace of planned work. This has been most effective in driving up standards in Years 8 and 9, so that students now reach Year 10 with a much better basis for progress towards GCSE. Meetings are well used to share good practice, and work seen in lessons confirms how well this underpins progress. The time provided for French is a little below average and the time for German is low across Years 8 and 9, so that standards attained attest to good teaching and the commitment of both teachers and students to ensure progress. Staffing, accommodation and resources are good, and well used to support learning. Display of students' work and other celebrations of activity in the subject, such as a residential visit to Boppard, add significantly to the good learning atmosphere within the subject. Better levels of attainment and progress, good teaching, positive attitudes and strong leadership indicate good improvement since the last inspection.

## MUSIC

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

### Strengths

- Good standards are achieved in GCSE examinations.
- Teaching by knowledgeable and enthusiastic staff is very good.

- A varied range of extra-curricular activities engenders enthusiasm and helps to raise standards in music.
- Assessment and recording are good: students' progress is monitored well.
- Leadership and management by the head of department and commitment of other staff are very good.

#### Areas for improvement

- The scheme of work for students in Years 8 and 9 needs to be revised and updated.
- Information and communication technology is not fully used to support teaching.

140. Students on arrival at Nower Hill have experienced a variety of skills and musical knowledge. They progress well and attainment at the end of Year 9 is above national expectations. Performing skills, both by individuals and ensembles, are high compared to students' oral and written evaluations, which are less well developed. The Teacher Assessments undertaken at the end of Year 9 and work seen in lessons and on recordings confirm a picture of very good attainment. Girls achieve a little better than boys, though the gap is smaller than nationally. During lesson observations boys were often more forthcoming and confident with answers than girls.
141. Examples of very good performing standards, among students who choose to study GCSE music, were seen during the inspection. These skills assist them in their GCSE work. The GCSE results for both boys and girls in 2000 were in line with national expectations. The numbers of students who gained the higher (A\*-C) grades in 2001 increased by more than 10 per cent and girls achieved better than boys. However, some boys still achieved the highest grades. All students, including those with special educational needs, make good progress. Enabling students, especially Asian students, to use their knowledge and understanding of Indian music as part of their examination work helps them to make better progress and achieve well.
142. Standards in lessons observed at the start of Year 9 were good: students are in line to achieve well, by the end of the year. In lessons on poly-rhythms, students understood the need to practise and the importance of pulse and holding their own parts. They successfully built rhythm patterns and layers to develop group compositions and achieved average standards. Students acquire good understanding of musical vocabulary and form on the GCSE course. By the start of Year 11, they understand chord progression, key signatures and the principle of transposition. Standards are above average and reflect good progress in lessons. Students are in line to do well at GCSE.
143. Teaching is a major strength of the music department and is very good. This ensures very good learning by all students in lessons. The musical knowledge and high quality demonstrations by staff ensure that students want to learn, take pride in their work and are well motivated to reach high standards. Activities are well linked so that time is not wasted and learning time is maximised. Skills are practised and evaluated regularly. A singing lesson with Year 8 students was delivered enthusiastically with a strong emphasis on vocal technique, posture and diction. The key points of the lesson were reinforced regularly through appropriate songs which students enjoyed singing. At the end, a good two-part song was performed and linked well to their practical work. Students were clear about how they could use dynamics and tempo, practised earlier in their compositions, thus improving their work. Students are expected to use technical language. Good questioning helps students develop their answers and give justifications for them. Lessons are well planned to ensure that students who play instruments, and are therefore conversant with musical staff notation, can use one method while others use alternative methods of recording and notating their compositions. This difference was clear where one student described how he managed to fit the quaver pattern into his samba rhythm, and another discussed fitting short and long notes together. Current teaching has focused more on practical and creative skills and needs to reflect more equally the whole music curriculum. The lesson arrangements and planning for Years 8 and 9 students are under review, and it is intended to improve the balance and focus of work taught.
144. Students in Years 10 and 11 are helped to learn well independently through structured worksheets which develop their knowledge and understanding of musical history, terms and conventions. They want to succeed and the rigorous and effective marking ensures that they know how to do better. Students in a Year 10 class were taken through questions relating to *Rock around the Clock* in a structured way, enabling them to improve and develop their answers to achieve maximum marks. Very good use is made of homework which relates to their work in class and builds on their musical learning. On occasion, students find it difficult to answer orally and more opportunities could be provided for them to give practical demonstrations. Another area in which students are not so confident is in their critical response to music. More opportunities need to be provided for them to write about performances, giving musical reasons and justifications for their preferences. This would give more challenge and opportunity for the more

able. Students use the Internet to help them research information but, at present, opportunities for them to use computer software for composition are limited. The display of subject vocabulary around the department makes a good impact on their literacy and helpfully relates to current lessons. Display is also well used to celebrate students' compositions.

145. Students have very good attitudes to their lessons and the variety of extra-curricular activities they are offered. Participation and commitment by students is high. The staff give freely of their time at lunchtimes and after school. This ensures that students have ample opportunities to practise and develop their skills. Co-operation among students in lessons is good; relationships are very good. All students work well together, valuing their ensembles and opportunities to perform in a variety of venues. The department provides a rich wealth of opportunities which reflect the variety of backgrounds and interests of the students.
146. Since the previous inspection there have been many changes of staff. The department is now fortunate to have in post a head of department whose leadership and management are very good. Although new to the profession, he displays a maturity and realistic awareness of strengths and weaknesses with appropriate priorities on which to build. A good foundation has been established. Accommodation is very good and enables a wide variety of music-making to take place. Resources are used well, enabling high quality digital recording of students' work. Use of this and well-planned monitoring of progress mean that assessment is good and helps students to know how they are doing and how to improve.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Students achieve well in a wide range of activities.
- Good quality of teaching.
- A wide range of extra-curricular activities, which are well supported by students.

### Areas for improvement

- The opportunity to take dance as a GCSE subject.
- The regular involvement of students in the planning and evaluation of their work.
- The use of assessment information to set targets for individual students.

147. For the last five years the number of students gaining the higher (A\*-C) grades at GCSE has been consistently better than the national average and in the most recent examination the number of students gaining the higher grades was well above the national average. Usually more boys take the examination than girls, although in the last examination the girls gained better grades than the boys. The results students achieve are better than their results in most other subjects.
148. Students enter from their middle schools bringing with them a wide range of physical education abilities, but in some activities, mostly gymnastics and dance, skill levels are lower than expected usually from students at the end of Year 7. Most students make good progress during Years 8 and 9, and by the time they are 14 years old, the majority attain standards that are at least in line with national expectations. In games activities students have a good knowledge of the rules of a variety of games, and are developing the skills to enable them to compete successfully, although some students find it difficult to apply those skills when the element of competition is introduced. Good quality netball skills were observed in a number of lessons. Most students arrive at the school with only a very limited experience of dance, but quickly respond to the good quality of teaching and, by the end of Year 9, are able to demonstrate good patterns of movement and gesture, which are usually performed with clarity and fluency. In gymnastics, body management skills are developing, with most students being able to display a range of movement both on the floor and on apparatus, with an increasing competence and ability to link them together into complex sequences. Many students have a satisfactory understanding of how to prepare for physical activity, but are still usually dependent on the teacher to lead them at the beginning of lessons. Some students are able to evaluate their own and others' performance, and to make perceptive comments on how improvements can be made, but others are given too little opportunity to develop this aspect. Students have progressed well to achieve average standards by the end of Year 9.

149. Students make good progress during Year 10 and 11 and by the time they are 16 years old most, particularly those in the examination groups, are producing work that is better than that usually seen among students of this age. Students have the skills and knowledge to undertake a range of activities. They can play and know the rules of a number of games and some confidently act as officials for these games. They are able to apply basic tactical ideas to their games, for example, in a Year 11 basketball lesson, boys were able to select from a range of defensive strategies when planning how to defeat the opposing team. Students in the examination groups are developing an understanding and expertise in both the theoretical and practical aspects of the activities. They are becoming confident in their use of technical language, and are able to contribute to discussions on a range of physical education topics. This was well demonstrated by a group of Year 11 students when many made very perceptive contributions to a discussion of professionalism in sport. Most students are producing course-work folders that are well presented and detailed. Students with special educational needs are well integrated into groups and make good progress. Teaching is sensitive and very supportive. Students achieve standards of attainment that are appropriate for their ability.
150. School teams take part in many inter-school competitions and matches and gain much success. A good number of students have represented the borough of Harrow and some have gone to represent west Middlesex. A Year 11 student has recently represented England at athletics. For three years a large number of students have taken part in a London-wide panathlon, a competition which involves many school teams competing against each other in a wide variety of sporting activities, and they have gained much success.
151. The good standard of teaching reported at the last inspection has been maintained. All lessons observed were at least satisfactory and the majority were good or very good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, deliver their lessons with pace, use a good range of teaching methods and make good use of a variety of tasks and apparatus to meet the needs of all the students. Lessons are well planned and objectives are shared with students. The management of the students, through the use of established routines and the high expectations of the teachers, is a strength of the department. Students respond very positively to the good quality teaching. The vast majority of them are highly motivated, work hard, behave well and co-operate with each other and their teachers. Their enjoyment of their lessons is very evident.
152. Since the last inspection, a revision of the curriculum has taken place resulting in an offer that is broader and more balanced and which is meeting the statutory requirements of the National Curriculum. Following comments in the last inspection report the department is updating its assessment procedures and has used the information and communication technology skills of staff to create, in a readily accessible form, comprehensive information on the attitude and attainment of the students. The department now needs to use this information to help them set individual attainment targets for students. The number of students taking the GCSE is good and, while the total time allocated for the examination course is in line with that recommended, the double period lasting one hour and forty minutes is too long for the whole time to be used productively. The department should explore the possibility of offering its students the opportunity to take dance at GCSE.
153. Many staff, including non-specialists, give very freely of their time to provide a wide range of extra-curricular activities, which are very well supported by large and enthusiastic groups of students. A good example of such participation was observed when a visiting dance teacher attracted over 70 students to her after-school session. Students have the opportunity to take part in the Duke of Edinburgh award scheme, go on skiing trips abroad and join outdoor activity holidays in France.
154. This is a well-led and well-managed department. Teachers work effectively together, showing commitment to the improvement of the department. The very good quality accommodation is well used and makes a positive contribution to the attainment of the students. The schemes of work and other documentation are of high quality and help the delivery of the curriculum. Good quality displays around the school effectively stimulate students' interest in the subject.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Standards at GCSE have improved since the last inspection.



- In Years 10 and 11 the teaching is consistently good and students achieve well.
- Students have positive attitudes to the subject and enjoy religious education.
- The department is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- No provision is made for religious education in Years 10 and 11 except for those students taking the GCSE course: other students do not receive their statutory entitlement.
- Students do not make enough progress in all aspects of their work in Years 8 and 9 because of inconsistencies in the quality of teaching.
- Students' tasks and activities in Years 8 and 9 are not always well structured enough to enable them to make maximum progress in lessons.

155. The overall standards of work of Year 9 students seen during the inspection are at the level expected by the Harrow Agreed Syllabus. Students have a sound knowledge and understanding of different religious traditions, and many of them are able to draw successfully on their own community backgrounds. Year 9 students are beginning to grasp religious ideas about meaning and purpose, as in their work on creation stories. Higher-attaining students, for example, were able to put forward persuasive points of view, both orally and in writing, when discussing the Biblical accounts of creation; lower-attaining students, whilst able to make some good oral contributions, had more difficulty in expressing their ideas in writing.
156. Results at GCSE at the higher grades (A\* - C) have been above national averages in recent years, although the results in 2001 were not as good as others recently. However, the candidates in 2001 did at least as well as, and often better, than they did in their other subjects. In Year 11, standards of work seen were above the national average: students achieve well. They have a secure grasp of some of the main concepts within Hinduism and in their written work demonstrate a good understanding of the impact of Christian beliefs on social and moral issues. Students' essays on aspects of medical ethics, for example, were thoughtful, well structured and clearly argued.
157. The overall achievement of students in Years 8 and 9 is satisfactory and they make steady progress in lessons. Students make clear gains in their understanding of religious ideas but they make relatively little progress in developing their knowledge of different religious traditions. This is partly explained by the time allocated to the subject in Years 8 and 9, which is a little below average. Those students who choose to take religious education at GCSE level achieve well and make good progress in lessons. They extend their understanding of the Christian and Hindu traditions, and become more confident in explaining religious ideas and moral issues. Students' attitudes to religious education are good in all years and make an important contribution to their achievement in the subject.
158. The overall quality of teaching and learning is good. In Years 10 and 11, teaching on the GCSE course is good and sometimes very good, but in Years 8 and 9 it is inconsistent. This mainly arises from variations in teachers' understanding of the subject. Where teaching has shortcomings in Years 8 and 9, opportunities to extend students' understanding are sometimes missed and tasks are not always well structured enough to enable students to make maximum progress, as in some lessons on the creation stories. However, where teaching is good in Years 8 and 9, expectations of what students can achieve are high, tasks are challenging, methods are appropriate and work is taken at a brisk pace. As a result, students respond well and learn rapidly, as in a Year 8 lesson on the sacrifice of Isaac, when students discussed the story well, grasped the main ideas quickly and noted the key points accurately. In Years 10 and 11, the teacher's enthusiasm for the subject and knowledge of the topics taught are well used to develop students' knowledge and understanding. Skilful questioning, clear explanations and good resources enable students to understand new and complex ideas quickly, as in a Year 11 lesson on samsara in the Hindu tradition. Students are encouraged to use information and communication technology for learning, especially when doing research, but overall its use is at a fairly early stage.
159. The leadership of the subject is good, with a clear sense of purpose and direction, and a commitment to raising standards. However, in Years 8 and 9, the department works at a considerable disadvantage because half the teaching is in the hands of five non-specialist teachers who each take two or three lessons a week. This arrangement is unsatisfactory and makes it difficult to raise standards. The overall level of improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory. The subject is now well established at GCSE and standards at this level have improved since the last inspection. The number of textbooks has increased and units of work in Years 8 and 9 are now more clearly related to the Harrow Agreed Syllabus. However, no improvement has taken place in the provision for religious education for all students in Years 10

and 11 where the subject is still only available to those taking the GCSE course. The rest of the students do not receive their statutory entitlement to religious education.