

## **INSPECTION REPORT**

### **CHARTERS SCHOOL**

Sunningdale

LEA area: Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead

Unique reference number: 110046

Headteacher: Mrs M A Twelftree

Reporting inspector: Dr A R Beaver  
20224

Dates of inspection: 15 – 19 October 2001

Inspection number: 189277

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 pupils:	11 – 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	Charters Road Sunningdale Ascot Berkshire
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mrs W Rowe
Date of previous inspection:	May 1996

## INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
20224	Dr A R Beaver	<i>Registered inspector</i>		What sort of school is it? How high are standards? The school's results and achievements; How well are pupils and students taught? How well is the school led and managed? What should the school do to improve further? Key Stage 4;
9974	Mr D Singh	<i>Lay inspector</i>		How high are standards? Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development; How well does the school care for its pupils and students? How well does the school work in partnership with parents? Community links;
30198	Mr R Chick	<i>Team inspector</i>		Equal opportunities;
4372	Mr R Fordham	<i>Team inspector</i>	Religious education;	
19913	Mr R Garrett	<i>Team inspector</i>	English;	
14691	Mrs J Hall	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science; Biology;	
20588	Mr I Hodgkinson	<i>Team inspector</i>	Information and communication technology; Economics;	
15051	Mrs L Kauffman	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology;	
20192	Mr T McDermott	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical education;	
4757	Mr D Morris	<i>Team inspector</i>	Art; Music;	
10782	Mr H Morton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Mathematics;	
15576	Mr D Nebesnuick	<i>Team inspector</i>	History;	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils or students?
1795	Mrs C J Sanderson	<i>Team inspector</i>	Drama; English as an additional language;	

11300	Mr B Smith	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography; Special educational needs;	The work of the SEN Unit;
15277	Mr C Vidler	<i>Team inspector</i>	Business education; Leisure and recreation;	
31838	Mr M Williams	<i>Team inspector</i>	Modern foreign languages French;	
20608	Mrs C Worthington	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physics;	

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## REPORT CONTENTS

	Page
<b>PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT</b>	<b>1</b>
Information about the school	
How good the school is	
What the school does well	
What could be improved	
How the school has improved since its last inspection	
Standards	
Pupils' attitudes and values	
Teaching and learning	
Other aspects of the school	
How well the school is led and managed	
Parents' and carers' views of the school	
 <b>ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM</b>	
 <b>PART B: COMMENTARY</b>	
<b>HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?</b>	<b>9</b>
The school's results and pupils' achievements	
Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development	
<b>HOW WELL ARE PUPILS OR STUDENTS TAUGHT?</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>HOW GOOD ARE THE CURRICULAR AND OTHER OPPORTUNITIES OFFERED TO PUPILS OR STUDENTS?</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS PUPILS?</b>	<b>23</b>
<b>HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS?</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?</b>	<b>34</b>
 <b>PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS</b>	 <b>39</b>
 <b>PART D: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN KEY STAGES 3 AND 4</b>	 <b>45</b>
 <b>PART E: THE STANDARDS AND QUALITY OF TEACHING IN AREAS OF THE CURRICULUM, SUBJECTS AND COURSES IN THE SIXTH FORM</b>	 <b>73</b>

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

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Charters School is attended by pupils and sixth form students who mainly live in Sunningdale, Berkshire. Most pupils come from the socially favoured area near to the school, but about one in three pupils come from other less favoured parts of the locality. Some local residents attend private schools. The school is comprehensive and provides for 1476 girls and boys aged 11 to 19 years. It is much bigger than most secondary schools. It is popular and oversubscribed, with many more applicants than places. Some 150 more pupils are on roll than at the last inspection five years ago. The sixth form consists of 269 students and is larger than most sixth forms. Fewer pupils than is typical joined or left the school other than at the usual ages of 11, 16 or above. Seven per cent of pupils have minority ethnic backgrounds, and the percentage of those who speak English as an additional language is above that of most schools. The percentage of pupils known to be eligible for free school meals is below average. The proportion of pupils identified by the school as having special educational needs is below the national average, but an average percentage has statements of special need. Some pupils have physical impairments and are provided for in a resource unit at the school. When pupils join the school at age 11, the range of their attainment is usually broadly average. However, the current Years 8 and 10 are a little more capable overall.

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

This is a very good school. Leadership is of high quality and very effective in providing a very good quality of education to meet the many different needs of pupils and sixth form students. Teaching is very good overall and some is excellent. Pupils usually achieve well and attain at least the expected standards. However, although many attain high standards, some do not attain equally well in all their GCSE subjects. The school provides very good value for money.

### **WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL**

- Leadership is of high quality and ensures very good educational provision.
- Overall, pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 11, and many attain high standards.
- Provision for the sixth form is very good and enables students to achieve very well.
- Pupils behave very well and relationships are extremely good.
- Teachers are enthusiastic and their high skills, hard work and commitment ensure that pupils learn very successfully.
- The special unit for pupils with physical impairments provides excellent opportunities for them to succeed.
- Links with the community are very good.

### **WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED**

- Pupils do not attain as well in some GCSE subjects as they do in most others that they take.
- Time for religious education in Years 10 to 13 to meet statutory requirements.
- Accommodation for learning.
- Use of the time when pupils are in tutor groups at the beginning of the day.

*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 in 1996, pupils have very largely achieved at least the standards that they should, and have often achieved beyond what might reasonably be expected. They make good progress, which is particularly impressive in Years 7 to 9. The quality of teaching has improved considerably and is now very good, ensuring that pupils achieve well. Most of the key issues of the last inspection have been resolved. More time has been provided for the teaching of music and religious education to pupils aged 11 to 16, but time for religious education to Years 10 and 11 is inadequate to cover the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus. Considerable improvement in the teaching and learning of information and communication technology has taken place, and many more modern computers are now available. With the support of the headteacher, governors have taken much greater responsibility for planning for the school's development. They give their professional expertise and time generously to ensure that they are well informed about the quality of work within the school. The range of training opportunities for staff has been greatly extended and training is now managed to provide very well for the needs of the individual and of the school. Although there are regular assemblies, pupils do not have the opportunity for an act of collective worship every day. A policy for pupils' spiritual development is in place, and provision for this aspect of pupils' learning is satisfactory. The school relies very largely on its basic income per pupil to provide material improvements, but funds have been used very effectively to extend learning opportunities. The headteacher and her senior colleagues, with the support of governors, have worked hard and successfully to raise sponsorship for the school's application to become a sports college. This application is currently under consideration by the DfES. The effectiveness of the school's leadership indicates powerful commitment and very good capacity for further improvement.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	Compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	A	A	B	C
A-levels/AS-levels	A	B	B	

**Key**

*well above average*    A

*above average*        B

*average*                    C

*below average*         D

*well below average*    E

*+Reference to similar schools is to those schools which contain a similar proportion of pupils who claim free school meals. This is considered to be a valid indicator by which to compare schools with pupils of similar backgrounds. Reference to all schools indicates all secondary schools across the country. There are no similar school comparisons at A level.*

When pupils enter the school at age 11, their attainments span the full range, but the overall profile of all year groups is broadly average. Girls and boys of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of competence make very good progress in Years 7 to 9 and achieve highly. In the National Curriculum tests in Year 9, pupils regularly attain results that are well above average, in comparison with all schools and with similar schools. Results in 2001 were a further improvement on previous standards.

In Years 10 and 11, girls and boys of all backgrounds and levels of attainment continue to progress well in most subjects and achieve what they should at age 16. At GCSE in most recent years, pupils attained well above average standards in gaining five or more grades A\* to C, with a high proportion of A\* and A grades. Pupils' attaining five or more GCSE A\* to G



and one or more A\* to G grades also achieved well. Well above average results have been maintained in recent years except in 2000 when, although results were still above average, a year group of slightly lower potential did a little less well. Nevertheless, their standards were still in line with those of similar schools. Standards in 2001 were higher. Pupils achieve well in English, mathematics and science and in most subjects. However, in recent years, pupils have not achieved as well in drama, history and modern foreign languages as they have in their other subjects, but there was much evidence of improvement in the 2001 results, with new leadership in these subjects.

The school sets itself very challenging targets for tests and examinations in Years 9 and 11 but, because they are set so high, published targets are not quite met.

In work seen during the inspection, pupils of very differing levels of attainment regularly achieve the standards that they should. In English, pupils read very competently and speak clearly and to the point. They write effectively and at length. In mathematics, pupils show high quality presentation, accuracy and rigorous attention to detail. In science, all pupils extend their use of scientific vocabulary, improve their practical skills and develop a broad understanding of the subject very well.

In the sixth form, students usually achieve at least the standards expected from their earlier attainment at GCSE. Standards are often higher than might reasonably be predicted, as in 2000, indicating good value added to students' levels of achievement by age 18. In 2001, students attained an overall pass rate of 92 per cent at AS level, with many high grades, and those who chose were able to continue their studies to A level successfully. A level results are regularly above average and sometimes higher. The proportion of A and B grades is regularly above average. In 2000, the latest year for which national comparisons are available, students attained highly in English literature, design and technology, French, geography, history, physics, sociology, and equally well in the advanced vocational course in business.

## **PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES**

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Attitudes to the school	Very good. Pupils want to learn and many are very highly committed to their studies.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good. Pupils behave very well in class and out of lessons.
Personal development and relationships	Very good. Pupils have mature attitudes. Relationships are very good among pupils and between pupils and teachers.
Attendance	Pupils' rate of attendance is above average, with little unauthorised absence.

Pupils from minority-ethnic backgrounds and those who are physically impaired are very well integrated into the life and work of the school.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	Years 7 – 9	Years 10 – 11	Years 12 – 13
Quality of teaching	Very good	Very good	Very good

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

A high proportion of teaching is very good and some is excellent to all ages. None is unsatisfactory. The school meets the widely varied needs of pupils very well. The needs of minorities in the school - for example, talented pupils, those with special educational needs, including some with physical impairments, those with minority-ethnic backgrounds - are all very well provided for by very competent teaching. Literacy is taught very well, and effective teaching extends pupils' numerical skills. Teachers are very skilful in managing pupils, ensuring their commitment and effort to learn are very good. They expect high standards and pupils almost always respond very well. Teachers' knowledge of their subjects is impressive and enables them to select the right methods to help pupils make the progress that they should. There are no significant weaknesses in teaching. Teaching of English, mathematics and science is very good overall. There is some very good teaching in all subjects, and excellent teaching was seen in: English, mathematics, science, design and technology, modern foreign languages, music, religious education and sociology. Much very good teaching was seen in art and physical education.

The large majority of pupils learn successfully and often make very good progress throughout Years 7 to 11. They concentrate in class and are often enthusiastic. They work hard, intellectually, physically and creatively, sometimes without close direction from teachers. They respond very well to teachers, who enable them to achieve as well as they can. Sixth form students' maturity and sense of purpose enable them to learn successfully in class, and they use the time available for private study very effectively to extend their subject knowledge and understanding.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good. Extensive learning opportunities at all ages. Insufficient provision for religious education in Years 10 to 13.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good for all pupils with special needs. Excellent support for pupils with physical impairment in the special unit.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Pupils are well supported, enabling them to follow the curriculum successfully and achieve very well.
Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development is very good. Provision for their spiritual development is satisfactory.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Pupils are very well cared for. Expectations and support for them to achieve their best are strong.

Parents have confidence that the school will enable their children to do well. The school maintains good working relationships with them. The curriculum provides very successful vocational courses in Years 10 and 11 and in the sixth form. A new course in information

and communication technology has begun very well in Year 10. Statutory requirements are not met for religious education in Years 10 to 13, and pupils do not have the opportunity for an act of collective worship every day. Extra-curricular provision is very good, and pupils' opportunity for residential experience is excellent.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Very good. Leadership of high quality ensures that pupils receive a very good standard of education and achieve well.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Very good. Governors have extended their knowledge of the school well and use their professional skills most effectively in the school's interest. They are closely involved in planning for the school's further development.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Very good. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance effectively inform decisions.
The strategic use of resources	Very good. The school uses the funding available very well to ensure very good teaching and support for pupils. Accommodation and learning resources enable pupils to be successful learners.

Staffing is very effective in advancing pupils' learning. Most accommodation and learning resources are of good quality and provide a valuable opportunity for pupils to extend their learning. Some accommodation is not easily accessible, and some restricts the work pupils can do in design and technology. Further improvements are planned. The principles of best value are applied very well.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The school expects their children to work hard, do well and become mature and responsible.</li> <li>Teaching is good.</li> <li>The school is well led and managed.</li> <li>Behaviour is good.</li> <li>Their children like school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Being able to work more closely with the school.</li> <li>Being better informed about how their children are progressing.</li> </ul>

Inspectors agree with parents' positive views. The school has high expectations of their children and they respond well to the very good teaching that they receive. Some parents say that they want to work more closely with the school. Many support the school association to raise funds or work in the school shop. Some want to work with the school in other ways. The school is responding positively to parents' views and is consulting on how the working partnership can be made closer. The information that parents receive on their children's progress is good. Most parents appreciate the written reports on their children's progress, and many consider consultative evenings to be very helpful and informative.

## ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM      CHARTERS SCHOOL

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form consists of 269 students and is larger than average. It has increased in size since the last inspection. Slightly more male than female students are on roll. Many students have backgrounds of social and economic advantage. Some students have minority ethnic backgrounds. A well-above average percentage of Year 11 students continue their education full time at age 16, most of them in the school's sixth form. Students are provided with an increasing range of advanced courses at 16-plus, including some advanced and intermediate vocational courses and key skills. The school works in partnership with a private school and other outside agencies to extend the range of courses available to students.

### HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The school provides very effectively for the needs of its sixth formers. Provision is cost-effective. Students become young adults with remarkably mature and responsible attitudes while in the sixth form. They regularly attain above average standards on advanced courses and often achieve more highly than might reasonably be expected from their GCSE results. Standards have been maintained well in recent years. Students extend their knowledge and understanding of their subjects very effectively because most teaching is very good and some is excellent. The leadership and management of the sixth form are very good. The main strengths and areas that could be improved in the sixth form are:

#### STRENGTHS

- Students attain above average standards and often achieve more highly than might reasonably be expected.
- New AS level courses have been introduced successfully and students have achieved well, enabling them to continue with their chosen subjects to A level.
- Teaching is very good and some is excellent, enabling students to learn from the subject expertise of teachers and, sometimes, by applying their own skills more independently.
- Students have remarkably mature and responsible attitudes to school and to study.
- Leadership and management of the sixth form are very effective in providing a very good quality of education, which supports students' progress very well and enables them to enjoy and appreciate the worthwhile experience that they gain.

#### WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Religious education is not provided.

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

## THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

The table overleaf shows overall judgements about the provision in the subjects and courses that were inspected in the sixth form. Judgements are based mainly on the quality of teaching and learning and how well students achieve. Not all subjects in the sixth form were inspected. The set criteria for choice of subjects are: the inclusion of English, mathematics, a science, and vocational courses; a span of curriculum areas; the school's provision; strong and weaker subjects; take-up; different levels of courses where applicable; inspection of courses not provided on site; inspection expertise available.

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	<b>Very good.</b> Teaching is good throughout the school, with many strengths. Several excellent lessons were seen. Pupils of all prior attainments achieve well because they work hard and teaching is strong.
Biology	<b>Good.</b> Students achieve well in lessons and are reaching the standards expected of them. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and the quality of teaching is good.
Physics	<b>Very good.</b> Teaching is very good and ensures that students regularly attain high standards.
Design and technology	<b>Very good.</b> Standards of A level and AS design and technology are high. Teaching is innovative and inspires learning of consistently high quality. Students' further achievement is hampered by unsatisfactory design of rooms.
Business studies	<b>Good.</b> Results from advanced GNVQs taken in 2000 are well above national standards. Good support is being given to students taking the new AVCE qualification. Closer links with the business community are needed.
Economics	<b>Very good.</b> Strong results have been regularly attained at A level, and at AS level in 2001. Teachers have expert subject knowledge and organise courses very well to enable students to achieve highly.
Leisure and recreation	<b>Very good.</b> Teachers' planning of learning activities is excellent. Expectations are very high, and students respond with great enthusiasm and achieve highly.
Drama and theatre studies	<b>Satisfactory.</b> Results have been below average but students are now achieving well in lessons. The quality of teaching and learning is now good, as a result of new staff appointments.
Music	<b>Very good.</b> Standards at A level are usually high. The few students involved attained A grades on the AS course in 2001. Teaching and learning are consistently very good.
Geography	<b>Very good.</b> Teaching and learning are of such quality that students develop high skills and great interest in the subject. Results are strong.
History	<b>Very good.</b> Results are regularly very good and students achieve impressive gains on their standards at GCSE. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and advance students' learning very well.
English	<b>Very good.</b> Results are consistently very good. Students achieve very well and attain high standards because of the very good teaching that they receive.
French	<b>Very good.</b> Standards in the sixth form are very high; teaching is consistently of very high quality, promoting use of the language with ease and fluency.

In other subjects, work was sampled. Teaching was very good overall, and sometimes excellent, for example in chemistry, psychology and sociology.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Students receive helpful guidance when choosing their courses. Induction into the sixth form is very good. Students are very well supported through their courses and their progress is very closely monitored. They receive very good guidance concerning higher education.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Leadership and management are very effective in ensuring a very good quality of provision for students, who enjoy equal access to all courses. Standards of work and results are closely analysed and findings inform decisions on future provision. Teaching is closely monitored and is very good.

## STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Good challenging teaching enables them to learn successfully.</li> <li>• Teachers provide individual help and support when needed.</li> <li>• They are helped to settle into the sixth form well and given helpful information on courses.</li> <li>• They are treated as responsible young adults.</li> <li>• They are helped and encouraged to study and research independently.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advice and guidance on careers and job opportunities by age 18.</li> </ul>

The inspection team agrees with students' positive views. Teaching is very good and teachers willingly provide individual help with work when it is needed. Many guide students to work more independently, helping them towards managing what will be expected of them in higher education. The school's leadership and the head of sixth form and his team are very supportive. They ensure that students settle in well and monitor their progress closely. Students are treated as young adults and expected to act very responsibly. This is reflected in their maturity and sense of purpose. They receive very good support and guidance in their choices for the future, including those applying for highly competitive university places. The quality of advice concerning applications for employment at age 18 has improved recently, and is now of good quality.

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

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

*+Reference to similar schools is to those schools which contain a similar proportion of pupils who claim free school meals. This is considered to be a valid indicator by which to compare schools with pupils of similar backgrounds. Reference to all schools indicates all secondary schools across the country.*

1. When pupils enter the school at age 11, their attainments span the full range, but, overall, the profile of all year groups is broadly average. Years 8 to 9 had slightly higher profiles of attainment on entry than pupils in Year 10 and above, shown by the school's regular testing, validated by a national testing organisation. At the time of the inspection, the results from the testing of Year 7 had not been received by the school. The National Curriculum tests, which pupils take in Year 6 in their primary schools, show improved standards in recent years, as is the case nationally. The majority of the current Year 7, whose results were known, attained at or above the expected level (Level 4) in these tests. The proportion of pupils on roll who have special educational needs is below average, but the number with statements of special need is average. Some pupils have behavioural and emotional difficulties which adversely affect their learning, and some have specific learning difficulties.

2. Between entry to the school in Year 7 and the end of Year 9, pupils make very good progress and achieve very well. In the National Curriculum tests in Year 9 in 1999 and 2000, results were well above average. They compared very favourably with those of all schools and with similar schools in English, mathematics and science, the three subjects tested. Results in 2001 were a further improvement on previous standards.

3. In the work seen in Years 7 to 9, pupils achieve very well, reaching at least the standards that they should. Pupils with special educational needs make very good progress. This shows particularly in literacy, where many enter the school with poor standards of literacy, but make very significant gains in literary skills by Year 9. This very good progress is helpful to their learning in all subjects. All pupils develop literacy skills very well and achieve highly. Their skills in using numeracy are above average and are applied well in all subjects. The development of a numeracy strategy is not as well advanced as that of literacy, as is often the case nationally. In English, mathematics and science pupils achieve very well. They attain well above average standards in English. Their reading is very competent and they make rapid gains in speaking in public. Their creative writing is impressive. In mathematics, standards are above average. Higher attainers manage equations in algebra, for example, with considerable skill, and lower attainers are competent in geometrical work. In science, standards are well above average. For example, higher attainers predict chemical reactions and use formulae confidently. Pupils of lower attainment understand how to alter a current in an electrical circuit and achieve very well.

4. In other subjects by the end of Year 9, pupils make very good progress and achieve well, given their overall average level of attainment on entry to the school at age 11. Their achievement is good in: art, drama, history, information and communication technology, modern foreign languages, music, physical education and religious education. They achieve exceptionally well in design and technology and geography.

5. In Years 10 and 11, girls and boys of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment continue to progress well in most subjects and achieve at least the standards that they should by age 16. At GCSE in the most recent years, pupils have attained well above

average standards in gaining five or more grades A\* to C. A high proportion of A\* and A grades are regularly attained in most subjects. Well above average numbers of pupils attain five or more GCSE A\* to G grades and one or more A\* to G grades. Overall, well above average results have been maintained except for 2000 when a year group of slightly lower potential did a little less well. However, their results were still above average and in line with those of similar schools. Standards in 2001 were higher at all grade levels and in the average point score attained per pupil. However, in recent years, pupils have not achieved as well in GCSE drama, history and modern foreign languages as they have in their other subjects. Leadership has recognised pupils' under-performance in these subjects and these departments have new leadership. There was clear evidence of improvement in the 2001 results, indicating good progress.

6. In work seen during the inspection by Year 11, pupils were achieving well. They make very good progress and achieve very well in spoken and written English, where they analyse texts very well and often write at substantial length. In mathematics, pupils continue to achieve well. They manage trigonometry, for example, with increasing skill and handle equations with growing competence. In science, pupils achieve very well. For example, higher attainers' skills of analysis, evaluation and interpretation of findings from practical investigations are impressive. Those whose attainment is lower still achieve results in practical work and record their findings successfully. From work seen in their other subjects by age 16, pupils achieve very well in art and geography. They are achieving well, and above what might reasonably be expected, in: drama, design and technology, history, music, physical education and religious education. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory in information and communication technology, modern foreign languages and business.

7. Pupils are attaining above national standards in most subjects in the work seen during the inspection, and in line with national standards in modern foreign languages and business. Only in drama are standards currently below the national average, brought about by previous difficulties in staffing for the subject. However, with new departmental leadership, Year 11 pupils are achieving well, and the situation promises improved attainment at GCSE.

8. During Years 7 to 11 overall, girls and boys of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of competence make equally very good progress and attain very well in National Curriculum tests and at GCSE. The support received by pupils for whom English is an additional language enables them to progress very well, and they usually attain high standards in National Curriculum tests and at GCSE, well in line with other pupils and often ahead of them. The school monitors the achievement of different ethnic groups, including those of minority-ethnic origin. Pupils with particular talents are identified by subject departments and supported with challenging work to achieve the standards that they should. The inspection found no issues of underachievement by any particular group of pupils throughout Years 7 to 11.

9. Pupils with learning difficulties who are on the school's register of special educational needs achieve well. The attainment of many pupils on the register is below and, for some, well below the national average and many have poor literacy skills. The level of success they attain in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations is a measure of the department's skill in providing for these deficiencies. In 2001, all 26 Year 11 pupils taking the extended English course gained a pass at GCSE, and only two were lower than grade E. Throughout Years 7 to 11, pupils with special learning needs make good progress in lessons in line with other pupils, and exceptionally well in English and science. Pupils with physical



impairments who are on the register of special educational needs and who are provided for through the school's special unit achieve the standards that they should. They often achieve more highly, attaining impressive results in National Curriculum tests and GCSE examinations in comparison with national standards for all pupils. Many continue their studies at AS and A level in the sixth form.

10. The school sets itself very challenging targets for tests and examinations in Years 9 and 11 but, because they are set so high, published targets are not quite met. However, it is testimony to the school's intention to aim for high improvement that targets are not always fully achieved.

11. Since the last inspection, pupils have achieved well and often highly. Standards attained by the end of Year 9 have been consistently well above average, and pupils have made very good progress in these years from average attainment on entry to the school. In Years 10 and 11, overall, GCSE standards have been well above average, with the exception of 2000 when the year group was of slightly lower potential. Results in 2001 were again strong at all GCSE grade levels. Pupils have not latterly attained as highly in GCSE drama, history or modern foreign languages as in their other subjects. New leadership in these subjects in ensuring improved standards, as results in 2001 show.

### **Sixth form**

12. At A level, students usually attain above average standards overall, as in 1999 and in 2000, the last years for which national comparisons are currently available. The average point score per student was slightly lower in 2001 than in 2000, but 41 per cent of the grades attained at A level were A or B. The pass rate at A level is consistently above that attained nationally, and the proportion of A and B grades gained is regularly ahead of that found nationally. In 2000, results in English, French, geography, history, physics and sociology were well above the national average, and at least average in all other subjects apart from home economics. Results in two of the three subjects taken at Advanced Supplementary level in 2000 involved too few students to make national comparisons meaningful, but results were well above average in mathematics.

13. In 2001, the first AS (Advanced Subsidiary) students to complete their courses attained an overall pass rate of 92 per cent, with many high grades. Those who chose to do so were able to continue their studies to A level successfully. Very few discontinued their studies entirely at the end of AS courses.

14. Students usually attain very well on vocational courses. Business courses are well established. Results have been strong in recent years, and 11 of 20 candidates for the Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education in business gained distinctions in 2001. Results in 2000 were well above average and are regularly at this level. Six of the ten students following the intermediate business course in 2001 gained merits. The first courses in leisure and recreation were taken in 2000-1. Very good results were achieved in the intermediate level examinations in 2001.

15. Students usually achieve at least the standards to be expected from their earlier attainment at GCSE. Standards are often higher than might reasonably be predicted, as in 2000, indicating good value added to students' levels of achievement by age 18. Students of different gender usually achieve in line with each other, despite some gender differences in examination performance year-on-year. Students from minority-ethnic backgrounds reach the standards to be expected from their earlier levels of attainment and achieve well in lessons.

16. In 2000, when the last students were entered for GCSE courses in the sixth form, results attained were very good, particularly in communication studies, computer studies and sports studies.

17. Students are usually very well qualified to proceed to their choice of course in higher education or to employment at age 18.

18. Students with physical impairment and who are on the special educational needs register make excellent progress. Students participate in a wide range of activities, including physical education, in which even a Year 13 student with severe difficulties takes part.

19. Since the last inspection, above average standards have been maintained. Students usually achieve at least the standards that they should from their earlier GCSE results and add significant value to their attainments by age 18. AS courses have begun very well, with very good results overall, enabling students to continue to A level successfully. Very good teaching ensures that students consistently achieve the standards that they should.

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

20. Pupils' attitudes, behaviour, personal development and relationships are very good and contribute positively to their progress and achievements.

21. Inspection evidence indicates that pupils like coming to school and have a very positive attitude to their learning, both inside and outside the classroom. They concentrate well and are very enthusiastic in lessons. They work very well together in small groups and support each other. Pupils respond very well when given opportunities to learn without constant direction by teachers. They take responsibility for their learning well. Many lessons in information and communication technology, English and design and technology, for example, give scope for pupils to learn more independently. Most pupils in all year groups work hard and sustain their concentration to the best of their ability. This has a positive effect on their attainment.

22. Pupils with special educational needs are very positive about their work. They behave very well when withdrawn from mainstream lessons for extra support. In Year 7, pupils withdrawn for literacy support are interested, work hard and are keen to complete tasks. They have very positive attitudes, as do those pupils in Years 10 and 11 who have additional support in English. They treat each other with respect and have confidence in their teachers. Where pupils are in mainstream lessons, they are not afraid to seek help from teachers and support assistants and readily accept it. Pupils discuss and explain their work in enthusiastic terms. This particularly applies to those in the special unit for physically impaired pupils.

23. Pupils find most subjects interesting and challenging and say so freely. They praise the quality of teaching that they receive across the curriculum. Evidence from discussions with pupils indicates that very good teaching encourages them to enjoy learning and to participate actively in most lessons. Pupils are very enthusiastic and appreciative of the wide range of extra-curricular opportunities available in the school. They participate well outside the classroom. For example, many pupils were observed playing football, netball and chess and taking part in the information and communication technology and homework clubs. These activities support pupils' achievements, progress and personal development very well.

24. Standards of behaviour are very good throughout the school. Despite narrow corridors in places, the school functions as an orderly community. The large majority of pupils show consideration for others, particularly for wheelchair users. Pupils are very polite, courteous and able to talk very confidently and informatively to adults. They treat their own, other pupils and the school's property with respect. Very occasionally, there is lively and sometimes boisterous behaviour. Although no bullying or aggressive behaviour was observed, a very small minority of pupils reported concerns about anti-social behaviour. However, they are adamant that incidents of bullying are dealt with severely, efficiently, and fairly and that racism is not tolerated. The number of fixed-term exclusions is below the national average and there are no permanent exclusions. All exclusions are monitored and the school is working hard to further reduce the rates of exclusion. Pupils throughout the school value the reward system and take a pride in praise for their work, effort and behaviour. Most parents report that behaviour is good.

25. The quality of relationships throughout the school is very good. Constructive, purposeful relationships among pupils and between pupils and teachers support pupils' learning very well. Pupils relate extremely well to their peers, to those in wheelchairs, to teachers and to other adults. They treat others with respect. Minority-ethnic pupils are well integrated in the school. Most pupils are willing to help others in a variety of ways. During the inspection, a number of older pupils were observed supporting the learning needs of younger pupils by hearing them read and by assisting wheel-chair users. A number of pupils serve their peers and the school as representatives on the school council or represent the school in sports and cultural activities. Students in Year 11 undertake work experience successfully, and employers praise their responsible attitudes. Some serve the wider community in a responsible and mature manner. Pupils value these experiences, which greatly contribute to all aspects of pupils' learning and personal and social development.

26. Pupils' attendance is consistently above the national average, and the level of unauthorised absence is consistently below the national average. Standards of punctuality are generally good, although occasionally a small number of pupils are late in the morning, usually because of difficulties with public transport.

27. Since the last report, relationships have remained very good. These contribute significantly to pupils' very good attitudes, behaviour and personal development.

### **Sixth form**

28. Students have very positive attitudes to learning in class and in time for private study. They are confident, motivated and well organised learners who work hard. They respond particularly well to the need to work independently of their teachers in some learning situations. This was evident in a significant number of lessons, and particularly in some English, information and communication technology and sociology lessons. For example, in a Year 12 sociology lesson, students discussed feminism effectively and constructively, and posed some very interesting questions concerning sociological perspectives on the role of the family. It was evident that these students respect each other's opinions and have a positive attitude to equal opportunities. Most students have positive attitudes towards involvement with extra-curricular activities. These opportunities enable them to mix with younger pupils and build good relationships across the whole school community.

29. Students behave very responsibly around the school. Pupils in the main school frequently praise sixth formers for their mature and responsible behaviour and the support they offer them around the school. Sixth form students often help younger pupils with concerns about bullying and discourage anti-social behaviour. During the inspection, there

were no concerns about anti-social activity and there are no student exclusions. However, some parents and pupils reported concerns about smoking around the school, consequently setting bad examples for younger pupils. Inspection evidence indicates that smoking is not rife, and there are clearly defined systems and sanctions that are used very effectively to discourage smoking among older pupils and students.

30. Relationships among students and with teachers are very constructive and contribute significantly to the warm and friendly atmosphere in the sixth form and around the school. Students enjoy interacting with each other and younger pupils. They respect each other. Staff and students from minority-ethnic backgrounds are well integrated in the life and work of the sixth form. There are very good opportunities for students to serve the school as prefects, and they take on this responsibility well. The head girl and head boy take responsibility for the efficient management of the school council. The deputy head girl and boy and other students act as liaison officers allocated to each year group, with specific duties negotiated between the student and head of year. For example, a sixth form liaison officer may be involved in giving advice on opportunities at age 16. Students manage these responsibilities with considerable skill, giving freely of their time and effort to make a valuable contribution to the whole school community. Some students serve on a social committee, organising events including rag day, which raises substantial funds for charity. The committee also organises the students' formal leavers ball. Sixth form students are actively involved in community work. For example, some provide football coaching to local primary schools. These positions of responsibility contribute significantly to students' personal and social development and enable them to become mature and responsible members of the school and wider community.

31. Attendance in the sixth form is very good. Most students enjoy coming to the school and value their education. Most students arrive on time for lessons. Their very good attendance and punctuality contribute significantly to their achievements.

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

*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.*

32. Overall, teaching is very good across the school. No lesson was unsatisfactory among the 160 lessons in which teaching was seen and graded in Years 7 to 11. The vast majority of teaching was at least good and the overall quality was very good. Of the 89 lessons seen in Years 7 to 9, teaching was consistently very good in English, science, design and technology, music and physical education. It was at least good in all other subjects. Some lessons seen were of excellent quality in science, design and technology and music. Of the 71 lessons seen in Years 10 and 11, the quality of teaching was very good overall. It was consistently very good in English, mathematics, science, art and physical education. It was satisfactory in business and modern foreign languages, and good in other subjects. Some excellent lessons were seen in English, mathematics, science and religious education. In GCSE history, modern foreign languages and drama, some pupils have not attained as well in examinations as they have in their other subjects in recent years. However, new subject leadership is active in making sure that teaching is contributing to improved standards, shown, to some extent, in better GCSE results in 2001. In general, little difference in the quality of teaching was apparent between the two key stages and there was some very good teaching in every subject.

33. The result of very good teaching is that pupils of all levels of competence learn successfully and gain the subject knowledge, understanding and skills that teachers intend. The school meets the widely varied needs of pupils very well, including those of pupils with talents in particular subjects, those with special educational needs, including some with physical impairments, and those with minority-ethnic backgrounds. The large majority of pupils learn successfully and often make very good progress in learning throughout Years 7 to 11. Girls and boys do equally well, and although there are some differences between their respective attainments in some subjects, there is no significant trend indicating underachievement by either gender group overall. Pupils with outstanding talents are well provided for by subject departments, who identify their particular needs and provide for these well. Pupils concentrate in class and are often enthusiastic about the subject. They work hard, intellectually, physically, creatively, sometimes without close direction from teachers. They respond very well to teachers, who enable them to achieve as well as they can in most lessons.

34. Literacy is very well taught. Pupils develop their literary skills very well and these enable them to learn effectively in all subjects. Those for whom English is an additional language make good progress in line with others as a result of the effective teaching that they receive. Effective teaching in lessons extends pupils' numerical skills, but the national strategy has run only from the beginning of the current term, and progress has yet to be formally monitored. Pupils acquire numerical skills well enough to support their work in other subjects. Pupils learn essential skills in use of information and communication technology effectively from Year 7 onwards. They are well taught and the well-planned use of modern computers and other equipment enables them to apply the skills of information and communication technology across the curriculum successfully.

35. Teaching is very good in the department for pupils with special educational needs. Teachers are well prepared, and lessons contain much humour, praise and encouragement. Pupils' knowledge and long-term memory are successfully exercised by appropriate tasks, and the work is related to targets in national examinations. Teacher enthusiasm helps give pupils confidence and they are not patronised. In mainstream classes, very conscientious learning support assistants liaise well with classroom teachers to ensure a clear understanding of the work and usefulness of provision. In many lessons, there is good use of information and communication technology ICT programmes to help special needs pupils make progress. Overall, the support staff is used very well. Support is very effective in ensuring that these pupils, with very varied learning and physical needs, make the progress that they should.

36. Teachers have very high expectations of what their pupils should achieve. Most lessons are demanding and rigorous experiences for pupils, enabling them usually to progress very well in gaining subject skills. For example, an excellent Year 11 science lesson on aspects of energy engaged pupils very actively in practical work and the logging and analysis of data with computers. The rigorous thought required in response to the teacher's challenging questions on possible sources of the loss of energy, provided stimulating insights into the nature of the subject and greatly enhanced pupils' subject skills. In a Year 7 design and technology lesson on diet and nutrition, the teacher generated great enthusiasm and interest among pupils so that all contributed without hesitation or inhibition in oral work and greatly extended their understanding. Their subsequent writing consolidated the creative experience that they had had very well. Teachers set homework according to the timetable, and this often involves challenging work to extend pupils' learning beyond lessons.

37. A very considerable strength of teaching is the high skill with which teachers manage their classes. In over half of the 160 lessons seen in Years 7 to 11, pupils' attitudes to learning and their standard of behaviour were very good. In only a tiny proportion of the

lessons seen were attitudes not positive. Teachers are very skilled in managing pupils, and respond effectively to meet their needs. Discipline in class is very good because teachers make work interesting and compelling to pupils who, in many lessons, are enthralled and enthusiastic to learn. Relationships between teachers and pupils are very good and pupils have confidence in teachers. In a Year 10 geography lesson on settlement, for example, very good behaviour and relationships led to high levels of co-operation and friendship.

38. Lessons are well planned. Teachers ensure that pupils are active learners for the whole of lessons. The brisk pace of learning rarely slackens, despite lessons of one hour and ten minutes in most subjects. The school day is invariably an intense but positive learning experience. For example, Year 7 pupils, withdrawn from a mainstream lesson for special support in literacy, were engaged with a good range of activities and worked very hard throughout. The teacher had planned well to overcome the infrequency of this lesson, enabling pupils to make very good progress in extending their literacy skills. A very good Year 8 lesson in dance, using music from "Grease", was very well planned so that all pupils knew precisely what was to be learned and how. The excellent planning enabled all pupils to participate well, including one in a wheelchair who contributed and learned with obvious enjoyment. An excellent Year 10 English lesson, in which pupils were preparing for a future visit of a police officer, involved them in a range of well-planned, purposeful activities, enabling them to extend their learning with whole-hearted enthusiasm.

39. The range of methods which teachers use is extensive and they are highly skilled in involving pupils in learning activities. They use probing questions to extend pupils' thinking, challenge their views and stimulate response. Questioning in modern foreign language lessons is often very effective and stimulates a good response in the foreign language from both boys and girls at all ages, although very occasionally teachers do not use the foreign language as much as they should with higher attainers. Teachers explain clearly and effectively, ensuring that pupils understand difficult ideas and meanings successfully.

40. Teachers' subject knowledge is impressive. It enables them to stimulate pupils' interest in topics and to take their learning forward very well. For example, the teacher's competent knowledge and understanding of Hinduism and well-chosen use of the "Game of Life" extended Year 9 pupils' learning very well, enabling them to gain much worthwhile experience of ideas, beliefs and culture that were new to them. The teacher's knowledge and questioning skills in a very good Year 8 history lesson on social change in sixteenth century England enabled all pupils to gain greater understanding of how economic conditions influenced people's lives.

41. Effective assessment of pupils' work is well managed. Teachers are skilled in advising and counselling pupils on how to improve their work. They are very hard working and many give their time freely to provide extra tuition and support beyond the school day to promote pupils' progress further. Pupils' work is usually marked carefully, and often suggestions are made about how it might be improved further. Learning resources are usually of good quality and used effectively in lessons or by pupils working independently.

42. Since the last inspection, teaching has improved greatly as a result of monitoring, through regular observation of lessons by staff with leadership and management responsibilities. In the inspection in 1996, seven per cent of lessons were judged to be of very good quality and 12 per cent were unsatisfactory. During this inspection, no lesson of the 160 seen in Years 7 to 11 was unsatisfactory and a very high proportion was of high quality, making teaching very good overall. Any lack of challenge for higher attainers in Years 7 to 9 is no longer apparent and pupils' present levels of achievement are high.

## Sixth form

43. Teaching is very good in the sixth form. Over half the 79 lessons seen in Years 12 and 13 were very good or excellent. Very few lessons were not of at least good quality, and none were unsatisfactory. Of the 13 subjects inspected in depth, physics, design and technology, economics, leisure, music, geography, English and French were consistently very well taught. Of the remaining 13 subjects, the teaching of mathematics, biology, business, drama and history was good overall with many very good lessons seen. Some excellent lessons were seen in mathematics, English and French. All other subjects were sampled and teaching was at least good overall. There were very good, and occasionally excellent, lessons seen in chemistry, information and communication technology, psychology, sociology, religious education, physical education and Spanish.

44. The very high quality of teaching enables students to learn effectively and to extend their subject knowledge and understanding very well. Students of all levels of competence on the courses they follow, with male and female students and those with minority-ethnic backgrounds achieving equally well. Students with physical impairment achieve highly as a result of effective teaching. Very good teaching enables students to add value to their achievements from age 16 to 18. Teachers help students to manage their learning well by helping them to acquire skills so that they progress successfully when they are not directly supervised or guided. The school intends students to go further in developing and using the skills needed at A and AS levels and subsequently in higher education or employment. It was ahead of most schools in piloting the key skills of communication, numeracy and information and communication technology and these are now widely and effectively applied in students' work.

45. Students are very interested and committed to their work. In three-quarters of the 79 lessons seen, students showed excellent or very positive attitudes to learning, and their attitudes were good in almost all the others. They concentrate very well in class and extend their learning often by highly active participation in lessons that are usually conducted at a very brisk and demanding pace. These are usually well planned by teachers to enable students to explore new knowledge and gain understanding actively, rather than have conclusions presented to them in a didactic style. Students in sociology and psychology are often challenged in this way and gain much from having to take considerable responsibility for their own learning. Students usually have a clear understanding of the purpose of the learning in hand, and are helped to understand the standard of their work and how they can raise their level of performance.

46. Teachers' subject knowledge is impressive. They use it to stimulate students' interest in learning very well, making lessons challenging and successful learning experiences. For example, a teacher's excellent subject knowledge guided Year 12 students in chemistry to meet the intellectual challenge of explaining links between structures, bonding and physical properties, and to take their learning forward to a high level in the topic. In religious education, the teacher's own understanding of Kant's "categorical imperative" enabled Year 12 students to discuss the subject well in a very good lesson. The teacher's highly competent use of Spanish in an excellent lesson for Year 12 ensured that students used the language naturally and confidently in a very successful learning experience. Teachers use a very good range of methods. Questions are often searching and open-ended so that teacher and students together expose a topic to thoughtful analysis.

47. In a very good Year 13 economics lesson on monetary policy, the teacher provided an analysis of the relationship between output, prices and demand with great clarity, so as to help students in groups to make key decisions on the topic for themselves. The intensity of the learning experience is sometimes daunting for individual students. However, the very good and sometimes excellent relationships among teachers and students provide personal

support for individuals who need it, as was seen in a Year 13 mathematics lesson where students encountered difficulty with some of the work.

48. Teachers assess students' work well, usually providing constructive criticism to deepen understanding. Assessment is managed well within lessons. In a Year 13 lesson in which arguments about responsibility arising from Truman Capote's "In Cold Blood" were discussed, the teacher very skilfully assessed students' progress in understanding the issues involved, drawing them together for the students to ensure that key judgements could be made. Teachers' marking of students' written work is properly critical and helpful, but also encouraging.

49. Few students discontinue their courses and those that do so have good reasons. Students appreciate the very good quality of teaching that they receive and say so freely.

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

50. The curriculum in Years 7 to 9 is good. The school offers pupils a broad range of subjects, including all requirements of the National Curriculum, extended by drama and a second modern foreign language. Information and communication technology is taught as a separate subject in Year 7 and is then taught effectively through separate subjects. Teaching time for the second foreign language, Spanish, is short, but pupils make rapid progress in the time available. Valuable additional English support is provided for those with weaker literacy skills. Some Year 9 history and geography lessons are in single periods of 35 minutes, unhelpful to pupils' use of computer rooms and or the library for research.

51. The curriculum in Years 10 and 11 is good overall, and includes all subjects required by the National Curriculum. The religious education provided is of good quality, but is insufficient to meet the requirements of the local agreed syllabus and does not meet statutory requirements. The range of options has been extended since the last inspection. Pupils usually take nine full GCSE courses and a short GCSE course in ICT. However, the school has adopted an alternative double GNVQ course in ICT in Year 10, which should considerably enhance the range of qualifications that pupils gain. It allows pupils to use on-line learning materials and to work independently outside the two timetabled lessons. This course is very well managed and has begun very successfully.

52. Personal, social and health education provision is through special events, subject coverage and tutor time in Years 7 to 9. Special days mainly provide the essential content required, but no special events were scheduled during the inspection. Some tutor time in the mornings is intended to support pupils' personal and social education, but it is not always used effectively enough and time is wasted in some morning sessions. Overall, provision for personal and social education in Years 7 to 9 is adequate, but more consistent use of the morning session with tutors is needed so that the short time available is used to full effect. In Years 10 and 11, personal and social education is well provided and extends pupils' learning and experience successfully.

53. Statutory requirements are met for 28 pupils who are exempted from the requirements of the National Curriculum in Years 10 and 11, mainly from modern foreign languages or design and technology. The school has followed proper procedures, consulting with parents and arranging careers guidance for these pupils prior to the decision to discontinue a particular subject. In all cases, these exemptions were to meet the individual needs of particular pupils. Pupils who need it receive additional support in English, and a few have the opportunity of extended work experience appropriate to their future aspirations for employment.



54. There are no issues of restricted access to the curriculum. The established post of co-ordinator to extend opportunities for gifted and talented pupils has recently been combined with work to ensure social inclusion across the school. An enrichment programme for high achievers is in place and much of the programme is delivered by special events through departments. Its range is impressive and contributes to the high levels of achievement at GCSE.

55. Pupils with special educational needs are usually identified at primary school. Further careful assessment on entry enables the school to provide additional opportunities very promptly. Pupils have access to the same full curriculum as their peers. For example, those within the special unit for physically impaired pupils follow courses of their choice in Years 10 and 11. The groups of pupils in Year 7 withdrawn for additional support in essential skills, especially in literacy, receive very good quality provision and make very good progress. Those who follow the additional English course in Years 10 and 11 almost always succeed at GCSE. Pupils' needs and targets are very clearly set out in their individual education plans and enable mainstream teachers to make the staged response required to meet the needs specified. Although there are few subject-specific targets, individual education plans are clear, detailed and practical. Pupils with statements of special need have pupil education plans containing targets set at annual review meetings. A support assistant monitors these plans several times each term. Teachers adapt resources effectively for pupils with special needs and provide extension work for talented higher attainers.

56. There are good links with the primary curriculum to ensure that pupils make continuous progress. Literacy is very well supported and developed from Year 7 onwards, and pupils achieve very well. The numeracy strategy was begun successfully in Year 7 from the current term, and other subject departments have identified how they will contribute to pupils' numerical skills. The school has plans to monitor developments.

57. The overall arrangements for pupils' work-related experience are very good. Careers education and work experience are part of all pupils' curriculum. There are good opportunities for learning about the world of work within school, and many very good links exist with employers and business locally.

58. There is a wide range of very good extra-curricular provision in the school. Parents welcome this wide range of opportunities, which includes very good residential experiences. There are ten visits to the Tirabad centre in Wales each year. In addition there are successful foreign exchange visits to France and Spain, and an activities week in the summer term, which provides extended experience of the media, business and the arts. Sporting activities are particularly strong. Almost half of all pupils took part in some extra-curricular sporting activity in the week before the inspection. This is a regular feature. The school has achieved the Sportsmark awarded by Sport England. In addition, it wins many district and county competitions. Pupils are currently rehearsing for a production of "Grease". A strong feature of provision includes support each week for pupils following examination courses, helping them to overcome individual difficulties and to achieve their best.

59. Community links are very good. The school has good pastoral and curricular links with its partner primary schools. These ensure that pupils enjoy a smooth transition from primary to secondary education and help the pupils to settle quickly into their new school. Effective links are in place with higher education through the training of student teachers. An extensive adult education programme is managed on site by the school, and the recreation centre is used well by the local community in the evenings. Close links are in place with local employers, business and the police. The school's application to become a Sports

College, if successful, is intended to extend its community links further.

60. Since the last inspection, the range of the curriculum has increased. More time for music and religious education has been made available in Years 7 to 9, as required by the key issue of the last inspection. Two modern foreign languages are now provided for all pupils from Year 8. The very good range of extra-curricular activities has been further extended. Community links remain strong. However, insufficient time is provided for religious education in Years 10 and 11 to meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. The requirement for a daily act of collective worship for all pupils has not been met.

61. Overall, the school makes very good provision for pupils' moral, social and cultural development. Provision for their spiritual development is satisfactory.

62. The statutory requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not met. Assemblies take place once each week for each year group, but these rarely constitute collective worship, though two assemblies observed did include prayer and some opportunity for reflection. At present, there is no substantial contribution to daily worship from tutor-time at the beginning of the school day. The programme for personal and social education contributes little. There are regular meetings of a Christian Union group run by students. Visits are planned to places of worship, such as a mosque, gurdwara and a Buddhist temple. There is some evidence of planning in departments for spiritual development, and opportunities were observed in some subjects, particularly religious education. Pupils are encouraged to consider and respond to questions about the meaning and purpose of life. In English, there are opportunities for pupils to use imagination and creativity. For example, a teacher used personal experiences of African village life to explore pupils' feelings and emotions. In drama, Year 9 pupils discussed dramatic tension, which enabled them to reflect, consider and develop spiritual thoughts. In design and technology, a pupil thoughtfully introduced the Christian ethic into a house design.

63. Provision for pupils' moral development is very good. Effective use is made of personal and social education lessons to focus on moral issues. Discussion of such issues as bullying, sex, drugs, values, family life, equal opportunities, vandalism, discrimination, prejudice and human rights help to raise pupils' awareness of moral considerations. The school expects pupils to know right from wrong and recognise their responsibilities. They respond very well when corrected. The strong anti-bullying policy, endorsed by the police liaison officer makes a very good contribution to this provision. Staff members provide good role models in the respect they show for others. Assemblies make a significant contribution to this area. One assembly stressed the importance of teamwork and respect for others' points of view. Subjects contribute well in providing opportunities for moral development. For example, in religious education, pupils consider aspects of morality in the light of their knowledge of religious and ethical issues. The life and work of the school as a whole show that pupils and adults respect each other. Respect is a school watchword, and the school community applies it very well.

64. Provision for social development is very good. The school provides many opportunities for pupils to take responsibility and develop social understanding. In personal and social education, pupils consider rights and responsibilities, healthy environment, sex and love, citizenship, and decision-making. This makes a valuable contribution to developing positive attitudes and fostering independent thinking. The prefect system, the mentoring system linking Year 11 with Year 7 pupils and the use of a sixth form liaison officer for each year group offer students valuable opportunities to exercise social responsibility. House teams and activities support relationships and social development across all age groups. In Year 7, pupils participate in a discovery day, and Year 11 has an end-of-year prom. Some subjects make a good contribution through, for example, the use of

pair and group work in drama, religious education and physical education. In art, workshops and a summer exhibition make a good contribution. Many school clubs also provide opportunities for pupils to work together. Opportunities for residential experience are particularly supportive of pupils' social development and all have access to the school's Tirabad centre and to residential experience abroad. Pupils are aware of the needs of others both locally and in the wider world through their good work for charities.

65. Provision for students' cultural development is very good. There are many opportunities for students to be involved in activities that support their cultural development. Opportunities are provided on a regular basis for visits to museums, art galleries and the theatre. All Year 7 pupils have an annual theatre trip. There are exchange visits to France and Spain and these provide very good opportunities for enhancing understanding of other cultures and for using the foreign language. The study of the different religions and cultures that support them are part of all pupils' studies. Over 90 pupils are involved in making music from India, China, and the Caribbean. In art, visits to the Tate Modern, presentations from visiting artists, and appreciation of Indian and Chinese art all make a significant contribution. Experience of cultural diversity is a significant part of pupils' experience. One assembly confronted pupils with stereotyping and discrimination and made a powerful impact on Year 10 pupils.

66. Since the last inspection, provision for pupils' cultural development has improved greatly. Provision for moral and social development has continued to improve. There has been some improvement in provision for spiritual development. The key issue of the last inspection to implement policy for spiritual development has been met. However, the statutory requirement for the daily act of collective worship is not in place, and pupils do not receive their basic entitlement to religious education in Years 10 and 11 to the extent that the law requires.

### **Sixth form**

67. Curricular provision is very good overall. There is an extensive range of courses of good quality. AS and new A level courses have been introduced successfully. Advanced vocational courses are provided in business and leisure. Some students follow a combination of AS and vocational courses, further extending the range of options open to them. Most students study four AS subjects in Year 12 and three A level subjects in Year 13, although there are opportunities to study more or fewer subjects if appropriate. In general, students achieve well in the courses that they follow. Nevertheless, the sixth form curriculum does not meet the requirement of a daily act of collective worship, nor does it provide for students' entitlement to the locally agreed syllabus for religious education.

68. In addition to the advanced level curriculum, good breadth is provided through the well co-ordinated general studies programme. This includes effective personal, social and health education modules. Worthwhile short courses are provided in public speaking, creative writing, car maintenance, survival cookery and many more opportunities. Visiting speakers are invited to extend students' experience. Regular debates are held to enhance presentational skills. A course of compulsory physical education is provided for Years 12 and 13 students, although not all students have access to these opportunities owing to subject timetable constraints. Other opportunities include the Community Sports Leader Award, Young Enterprise and the UEFA coaching award. The total provision is rich and varied, providing students with many opportunities to develop their skills, understanding and qualifications. Last year the school piloted a discrete Key Skills course. Key skills of communication, number and information and communication technology are now successfully integrated into all subjects.

69. Private study periods are well used to extend learning and to access the computer network. The sixth form common room provides a very good facility for private study and students use these rooms, under teacher supervision, in a sensible and mature manner when they are not in lessons. The library is also regularly used for private study.

70. The school is responsive in meeting the needs of all sixth formers. Students supported through the special unit for the physically impaired follow a full curriculum and achieve very well. In a few cases, where it is not possible to provide a subject to meet an individual student's need, the school encourages the student to seek additional courses in neighbouring institutions. An example of this is a student who studies ICT in the evening at a local college of further education. Increasingly students are joining the sixth form from other schools, attracted by the full and effective curriculum available. Part of all students' learning involves how to access opportunities in higher education and employment. They have full access to relevant information, in all forms, enabling them to make informed choices for the future.

71. Community links are very good and students have the advantages open to all pupils in the 11 – 16 school. Additionally, an excellent relationship has developed with a neighbouring independent school for the teaching and learning of theatre studies at advanced level and a range of other links have sprung from this. Both Charters and its neighbouring partner school recognise the considerable mutual benefits that spring from this connection. Links with neighbouring universities are good. Students are expected to provide service to the community. This may be within the school or outside. In school, younger pupils are assisted very well in lessons and sixth formers give excellent support to teachers in helping pupils with learning difficulties.

72. Provision for students' moral, social and cultural development is very good overall, and that for spiritual development is just satisfactory. The general studies programme makes little contribution and students' basic statutory entitlement to religious education is not met. Assemblies provide some opportunities for reflection and are often led by students. Some subjects make a contribution to spiritual development. For example, in A level religious education, students can explore attitudes and values through a study of Kant's concept of the "categorical imperative". However, in most subjects, opportunities are missed to enhance this important aspect of students' development.

73. Provision for moral development is very good. The school has clear expectations that students will develop a moral sense and recognise right from wrong, which they do very well. Sixth form students are very good role models for the rest of the school. They are involved in community service where there are many opportunities to develop and exercise moral responsibility. Students act as liaison officers for each year group, enabling younger pupils to discuss their concerns. Assemblies focus effectively on moral dilemmas, and several subjects contribute well in providing opportunities for moral development. For example, in modern foreign languages, discussion of democracy and citizenship provided a very good opportunity for students to explore and develop moral standpoints. Students have a strongly developed sense of conscience, reflect on the wider consequences of their choices and actions, and identify and discuss moral and ethical aspects of their personal behaviour.

74. Provision for social development is very good. There are many opportunities for students to take responsibility and extend their social skills. The involvement of many sixth form students with pupils in the main school provides excellent opportunities for students to exercise responsibility and leadership, thus developing a greater awareness of the needs of others and respect for them. Residential opportunities at Tirabad enable sixth formers to enhance their team-building skills and provide further opportunities for social development. Students organise a party for senior citizens and contribute to the occasion. Other

opportunities come through Young Enterprise and community service, which enables students to support others, especially those who have particular needs. Most subjects make a significant contribution to students' social development. For example, in drama, liaison with another school enables students to work with others in extending their learning. The use of discussion in most subjects provides further opportunity for students to enhance interpersonal relationships.

75. Provision for students' cultural development is very good. Students are keenly aware of the variety of cultural backgrounds of their peers and how these can contribute to society as a whole. They perceptively recognise racism in their own and others' behaviour and act upon it. A sixth form visit to the Atlas mountains greatly widened students' cultural awareness. Subjects make a significant contribution in enabling students to prepare for life in a multi-cultural society. Extra-curricular activities include residential experiences abroad in France and Spain, which many students take up.

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

76. The school provides very good support, advice and guidance for all its pupils. Arrangements for child protection, health and safety and careers guidance are all effective and very supportive of pupils.

77. The headteacher and the leadership team provide strong leadership for conscientious and committed staff, who carry out their duties of care in a sensitive and professional manner. Form tutors monitor academic progress, personal development, attendance and behaviour well, and make pupils aware of how well they are doing. Pupils value the opportunities for careers guidance, particularly in Years 10 and 11. Good attention is paid to pupils' health and safety. There is very good wheel-chair access for pupils who are physically impaired. Arrangements ensure that pupils learn in a safe and secure learning environment.

78. Procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' personal development are very effective and systematically monitored by form tutors and heads of year. They know their pupils well and are sensitive in their needs. Formal and informal contact time with pupils is used to build constructive and trusting relationships. Tutors and heads of year provide effective communication and respond sensitively to the concerns of their pupils. Teachers ensure that good relationships among able bodied and physically impaired pupils apply in their lessons. The staff values the achievements of all pupils and work hard to ensure the progress of pupils with special educational

79. The school has a comprehensive policy and very good procedures to achieve very good behaviour. They enable staff at all levels to monitor behaviour effectively. The code of conduct is clear and understood by the large majority of the school community. It encourages and achieves respect, consideration for others and self-discipline, creating a warm and friendly learning environment.

80. There are very good procedures for monitoring and eliminating oppressive behaviour. They are implemented well and all types of anti-social behaviour are thoroughly investigated. There are effective measures in place to discourage bullying and create an environment of mutual respect and tolerance. Monitoring is effective and resulting action gives good support to pupils affected by bullying. Exclusions are below the national average. There are procedures in place for investigating and monitoring racist incidents, which are rare. Known incidents are recorded, dealt with satisfactorily and reported to the local authority, in line with required procedures.

81. Procedures for monitoring attendance and punctuality are very effectively implemented. All absences are rigorously pursued and registers are taken at prescribed times. The headteacher and staff at all levels discourage pupils from taking family holidays during term time, and this has a positive effect on levels of attendance. Parents support the school's efforts to reduce absences, and most are very cooperative and instrumental in significantly reducing unauthorised absences. The education welfare officer supports the school's efforts to achieve very good levels of attendance.

82. All pupils are well integrated into the school including those pupils with physical impairment, others with different special educational needs and a range of minority-ethnic groups. Most pupils on the special needs register are taught almost entirely in their classes, in which they are fully integrated with other pupils. Learning support assistants are deployed adequately throughout Years 7 to 11 and continue their support for students in the special unit for physically impaired into the sixth form, as necessary. A measure of the comprehensive and inclusive provision for pupils with special needs is the very good use that teachers make of the voluntary involvement of sixth form students, who give additional support to Year 7 pupils in withdrawal groups.

83. Links with outside agencies are effective in supporting pupils' care and welfare. For example, the school has developed a very good working relationship with the local authority's behavioural support team, who give valuable support to a few young people who are displaying social or emotional problems.

84. Since the last report, the school has sustained its very good provision for pupils' care and well-being. The arrangements are highly valued by parents.

85. Procedures for assessing and monitoring pupils' attainment and progress are very good. Assessment in all subjects follows a common school policy, and thereby gives clear indications of the relative performance of pupils in different subjects. Major assessments of pupils' attainment and effort are undertaken three times a year in every subject, and reported to pupils, their tutors and, increasingly, to parents. Pupils are therefore made very much aware of how they are doing, especially in relation to the exam requirements in Years 10 and 11. Not all subjects, however, explicitly assess pupils in relation to their National Curriculum levels of attainment until they are awarded a National Curriculum level at the end of Year 9, so pupils are not always aware of the national level at which they are working.

86. The school makes very good use of assessment to guide its planning. There is an excellent system of liaison between heads of year and the subject teachers of pupils in each tutor group through termly meetings. At these times, the progress of every pupil is discussed and action plans are drawn up to remedy any problems of under-achievement. This leads to additional support for some pupils, and gives a focus to some of the work undertaken in the much valued and very effective after-school clinics held by many subjects. Each subject produces a comprehensive report to governors on its exam performance each year, offering a detailed analysis of the results of its pupils in relation to their target grades and predicted grades, to their performance in other subjects, and to changes in the subject's results over time. As a result of such close scrutiny, departments are encouraged to reflect carefully on their teaching methods and the structure of their courses. Significant changes have been made as a result, such as the shift from GCSE to GNVQ in information and communication technology.

87. The procedures for monitoring and supporting pupils' academic progress are very good. Target grades are set for pupils in Years 10 and 11 on the basis of their performance in Year 9 National Curriculum tests. GCSE or GNVQ predictions of grades, made by teachers in termly major assessments, are then compared with target grades to identify any areas of under-performance. The school's assessment database automatically sends letters

of concern to parents of any Year 11 pupil who under-performs by two grades or more at the termly assessment. There are no target grades in Years 7 to 9, but pupils are ranked in order of their scores in cognitive ability tests, so that any pupil who appears to be under-performing in relation to his or her competence can be identified and action taken appropriately. A very effective system of academic tutoring underpins the support given to pupils. In structured one-to-one interviews held after school throughout the year, tutors discuss with pupils the progress they are making in academic, sporting, and other regards. Pupils are offered constructive advice on a range of issues through these interviews and targets indicating action to be taken to improve performance are agreed.

88. Statutory requirements for the day-to-day provision of pupils with special educational needs are met. Pupils are identified early and are thoroughly assessed with the help of appropriate authorities. The register of pupils with special needs meets all requirements and all the teaching staff is fully aware of it. Assessment of progress is very good, and pupils are carefully tracked by use of data based on a range of tests. Those pupils with statements of special education need are monitored five or six times each term and there are screening tests for reading, literacy, non-verbal skills and quantitative abilities throughout Years 7 to 9. The department for special needs identifies and takes responsibility for all pupils with any type of learning difficulty, including those with behavioural problems and those with physical handicaps, who are very well supported in the very successful special unit for the physically impaired.

89. At the last inspection, the school's assessment system was at the planning stage; it has now been very effectively put into place. It is made all the more effective by the very good use by teachers and tutors of the computer database that charts pupils' progress over time. Its only omission is the recording of pupils identified by departments as gifted or talented.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Assessment***

90. Procedures for assessing students' work are very good. Teachers have worked hard to understand the assessment requirements of new advanced and Advanced Vocational Certificate in Education (AVCE) courses, and their assessment of students' work is accurate and helpful in all subjects. It is very good in art and music, for example, where students are very clear about the meaning of the effort and attainment grades. These are awarded in line with the school marking and assessment policy, and teachers' written comments offer students particularly clear indications about how to improve.

91. As in the main school, the skill with which subject teachers use assessment to guide their planning is very good. Each subject has to produce a comprehensive report to governors on performance in public examinations each year. Each subject report gives a detailed analysis of pupils' results in relation to their target grades and predicted grades, to their performance in other subjects, and to changes in the subject's results over time. As a result of such close scrutiny, departments are encouraged to reflect carefully on their teaching methods and the structure of their courses. Each student's actual results are carefully checked against their expected results and significant differences are followed up. The performance of particular groups of pupils is analysed in some reports, but this is not always the case.

92. In all subjects, students are assessed three times each year in their effort and attainment, and in each term indicative grades of likely performance in examinations are issued. These assessments are recorded on the school database and sent to parents in clear and helpful reports that track each student's progress in each subject over his or her

time in the sixth form. The assessment reports form the centrepiece of the very good academic tutoring sessions, which are one-to-one interviews with tutors held at least once a term to review each student's academic progress and personal development. Academic tutoring interviews also help to give very effective guidance to students at crucial points in the year, such as when they are settling into the sixth form in Year 12, or applying to colleges or employers in Year 13. Teachers, tutors, parents, and the students themselves, therefore, very carefully monitor the rate of progress. After-school subject clinics effectively address any problems with learning that have been diagnosed and are greatly valued by students.

93. Students speak highly of their teachers, and the extent to which teachers, tutors and sixth form leaders offer students individual help when required is very good. The comprehensive assessment and tutoring system is reinforced by the excellent practice of the head of sixth form meeting with subject teachers of every class to discuss the progress of individual students and decide on action to take where necessary. The head of sixth form is, therefore, particularly well informed about the progress of individual students and, with his deputy and tutorial team, is able to offer them advice and guidance of a very high quality. Course selections are therefore tailored carefully to meet the needs of individual students. The induction programme for the sixth form, held for Year 11 pupils after GCSE examinations in the summer term, is valued by students as a very good opportunity to clarify their option choices before starting their studies in the sixth form.

### ***Advice, support and guidance***

94. The educational and personal support and guidance for students in the sixth form is very good. It includes very effective careers education and guidance for future courses, study or career opportunities when students complete their courses. Students have particularly good access to information, support and guidance on higher education. The careers library is part of the main library and has plenty of information on future courses in literature or through computers. As a consequence, over three-quarters of Year 13 leavers went into higher education or art foundation courses in 2001. Nevertheless, students raised some concerns during the inspection about the quality of careers advice and guidance. However, careful inspection indicates that the school has taken much action to address any deficiencies in this area, with a newly appointed careers tutor, more time from the external careers adviser to target support to those who need it, and more materials available to tutors to provide support. Current provision for careers advice and guidance is, therefore, very good. The general studies programme further supports the quality of guidance in this area with modules on careers, interview skills, Young Enterprise, and life skills such as cookery and car maintenance.

95. The quality of support and guidance for students' personal development is very good. Throughout their time in the sixth form, students are given responsibilities and are monitored in carrying out those responsibilities. All are prefects, and their duties are effectively co-ordinated by a team of senior prefects. All must do community service, and they take seriously their responsibilities inside or outside school. The head boy and girl and their deputies organise and lead the school council with a maturity that belies their years, and act as the link between the student body and school management. The head boy and girl have weekly minuted meetings with the head of sixth form and attend governors' meetings. They receive leadership training at the nearby Civil Service College. The sixth form social committee organises a full programme of social activities, many of which fund new facilities in the common room. Throughout their time in the sixth form, the importance of participation in this range of activities is stressed to students. Personal development is given a very high priority and is highly successful in producing students who are mature, articulate, cheerful and very positive.



96. There are effective procedures to ensure the health and safety of students. Health and safety is given priority, and students continue to learn in a safe and secure environment.

97. There are very constructive and purposeful strategies in place to ensure high levels of attendance and low levels of unauthorised absence. All students are formally registered and there are effective guidelines to ensure their regular attendance. Students are required to inform tutors when they are late and to notify staff when leaving the school premises. These procedures are properly observed and ensure consistent levels of very good attendance and the safety and well being of all students. The head of sixth form systematically monitors all absences and ensures that the information is used effectively to pursue absentees and set targets for further improvement, particularly to reduce levels of unauthorised absence.

98. All students are formally registered and there are effective guidelines to ensure their regular attendance. Absences are rigorously investigated and students are expected to explain these to the satisfaction of their tutor. Students are required to inform tutors when they are late and to notify staff when leaving the school premises. These procedures are fully observed and ensure consistent levels of very good attendance and the safety and well being of all students.

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

99. The school has good links with parents overall, and an excellent relationship with parents of pupils with special educational needs. Formal and informal liaison takes place regularly.

100. Parents' views of the school and the sixth form are that they are very good. The majority of parents who attended the parents' meeting or responded through questionnaires praised the school, and thought there had been improvement since the previous inspection. Parents value the high expectations of the school and the high standards of behaviour achieved by most pupils and students. The vast majority of parents who responded to the questionnaire (Page 44 of this report) believe the school is well led and managed. The inspection team is in full agreement with the parents' very positive views of the school and its work. Some parents want to work more closely with the school; many support the school association and raise funds for the school, but some want to work in wider ways. The school is responding to parents' views and is consulting on how the working partnership can be made closer. It has held two meetings with invited parents to consider how the working relationship might be extended in ways that parents want.

101. Inspection evidence indicates that parents are well informed about their children's progress. The school makes parents welcome and responds effectively to their concerns. Most parents enjoy a positive and constructive dialogue with the school. Most parents are pleased with the good quality information they receive through the school prospectus, the home school agreement and the annual report from governors. These school documents are written in an accessible style and comply with statutory requirements. The end of year report on each pupil also provides satisfactory levels of information about pupils' achievements, attainment, attitudes to learning and personal development. All parents are provided with regular newsletters from the headteacher and school. This enables them to celebrate the achievements of pupils and community, as well as to keep abreast of events affecting the school. Most parents appreciate the information that they receive at parents' evenings, which are extremely well attended. Most parents perceive parents' evenings as helpful, constructive and informative. Their views are shaped by teachers' attitudes and thorough knowledge of their children.

102. Most parents make a very effective contribution to their children's learning inside and outside school. This has a very positive effect on pupils' achievements and personal development. Parents actively support the school association, run the school shop, and have raised substantial funds for resources to support learning. They attend school productions and concerts, support theatre visits, educational visits (including residential visits to Tirabad) and cultural exchanges to France and Spain, as well as support the careers education programme. Parents actively ensure their children's attendance and good time-keeping, as well as playing an active role in ensuring that their children behave in a mature and sensible manner. They support the school's work in maintaining high standards of attendance, behaviour and the quality of education. Most parents monitor their children's progress, achievement and personal development through the planner which every child carries. This indicates that parents' endorse their children's efforts in the completion of homework.

103. Parents whose children have special educational needs are kept very well informed of their progress. In addition to the normal pattern of parents' evenings, subject teachers in Years 8 and 9 meet to discuss formally the progress of individual pupils, and formal and informal meetings with parents help to promote effective liaison. Parents are invited to and usually attend review meetings and the special needs department keeps good records of parental contact. No parents have made adverse comments about provision for special needs at annual reviews. Parents are very positive in their opinions of the special needs department, in particular of the special unit for physically impaired pupils and students, which is much admired. Many parents of Year 6 pupils in primary schools in and out of the school's catchment area recognise the high quality of provision for special needs in the school and make enquiries about their children coming to Charters School.

104. Students are very satisfied by their sixth form provision, and speak warmly of the high quality of education, support and guidance they receive. They identify many strong features. Students appreciate the considerable support given to them by the head of sixth form, his deputy, and by their tutors and teachers in lessons and after school. They value the ways in which their progress is very closely monitored and discussed with them. They like the organisation of the school day. Since the early finish allows them to organise their time better, they can manage private study at home before taking on other activities in the evening, and they can attend after-school clubs or subject clinics. There is little time for private study in school, but it is managed well, with supervised study in the common room. Students can use computer rooms and computers in the library when they are free, but they would appreciate more computers in the common room for dedicated private study use. The common room is seen as an excellent facility, and the degree of responsibility given to students in managing this through the sixth form social committee is much appreciated. Current students feel that they are guided very well in their subject choices on entry to the sixth form, and value induction week at the end of Year 11. One group of students described as "brilliant" the preparation for life after school given through the programme for personal and social education within general studies. Since the last inspection, the good partnership between parents, the school and sixth form continues to flourish and support good levels of education.

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

105. Leadership is very good overall. Its high quality ensures that pupils receive a very good standard of education and achieve well. The headteacher's leadership is excellent. Her well considered, intelligent, forthright and vigorous approach to improving educational provision has taken the school forward very effectively, particularly in ensuring the very good quality of teaching which pupils receive. She contributes personally to this teaching, despite

the many management matters that exist in this, as in any, large school. Concerns where subjects have under-performed have been tackled directly, with the aim of ensuring that the quality of education received by pupils is consistently very good; the inspection's findings endorse the good progress being made in these subjects.

106. The headteacher has formed a very effective and hard-working leadership group whose skills complement each other very well. They ensure fair and equal opportunity to provision in response to need through their monitoring. The policy on equal opportunities emphasises the need for equal treatment of staff and pupils of all ethnic backgrounds and talents; this policy is reflected in practice. Teamwork among senior management is very effective because the headteacher, with the support of governors, has wisely chosen very competent senior post-holders, and has given them the scope to use and to enhance their skills in the interest of the pupils and the school. Several senior post-holders have acquired the skills to enable them to achieve promotion in recent years. The headteacher and her senior team ensure that the school's watchwords – unity, respect, excellence – are made real and lived out in the school by all staff and pupils. The vision, determination, skills and high expectations of leadership are all well in place to take the school further forward.

107. The leadership provided by governors is very good. They are very interested and committed to the school and very supportive of the headteacher. They are competent and use their wide range of professional expertise effectively on the school's behalf. Their committees enable them to develop particular expertise and understanding of important aspects of the school's activities. This is further extended by effective links with subject departments, extending to observation of lessons in some cases to enable them to gain a direct insight into the quality of provision and the standards achieved. In contrast to the situation at the time of the last inspection and with the support of the headteacher, they have become closely involved in planning for the school's further development and participate in planning conferences with senior staff in determining priorities. Nevertheless, governors do not meet statutory requirements for the provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11 to meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus, nor for a collective act of worship for every pupil each day.

108. The leadership and management exercised by heads of department are very good. Well established subject leaders in most departments manage their large teams very effectively, ensuring that teachers are well supported and that standards achieved in their subjects are what they should be. Newly appointed heads of department are working very hard to meet the school's expectation that pupils achieve equally well in all their subjects. The findings of the inspection confirm that there has been an improvement in GCSE subjects where standards have been below those achieved by the same pupils in their other subjects.

109. The special education needs coordinator gives effective leadership to a large team of specialists and learning support assistants. Leadership and management of the specialist provision are very good. All members of staff are given clear guidance, and good liaison is provided through the local authority's special education advisory team. One member from each department is an effective link with the special needs department. There are meetings once a term. Legal requirements for pupils with special educational needs are met. A governor is responsible for liaising with the department, and plays an active role. A good policy for special needs is in place, known to staff and available to parents. Record keeping is very good, with easy access to data through use of new technology.

110. Monitoring and evaluation of the school's performance is used effectively to inform decisions. The collection, analysis and use of data on performance are very good and enable the school to identify strengths and weaknesses in performance. The school has equally effective systems for using data to advise and support individual pupils so as to raise their levels of attainment. Teaching is monitored regularly and thoroughly. Senior

management and the respective heads of department conduct systematic observation of teaching in subject departments. Written evaluations of the quality of lessons seen are shared with the teachers involved and reviews are summarised and shared with the department in a supportive process, that assures the quality of teaching and learning across the school. The process has had considerable success, and this inspection confirms a substantial improvement in the quality of teaching since the last inspection in 1996. Performance management has been successfully introduced and provides additional assurance of high quality provision. Quality assurance is also applied to initiatives. For example, the focus of close monitoring and evaluation has recently been on literacy, the application of a policy for spelling, and teaching and learning styles. A particularly impressive feature has been the involvement of pupils who, with the help of senior staff, have reflected on the quality of teaching that they experience and which proves effective to their learning. These insights are helpful and inform the practice of teaching and learning very well.

111. School development planning is excellent. Priorities are identified well, such as the quality of teaching and learning. Clear criteria to evaluate progress are precisely stated and enable management to determine whether issues should continue to be a focus for development after the time indicated has elapsed. The time-scale of the plan is appropriate, and funding levels are determined by the priorities within planning. Governors and key staff share joint responsibility for the planning process. Its high quality ensures that the school works actively to common ends that are known and shared by all.

112. The school makes very good use of its available funding. Funds are very well managed and targeted to planned priorities. Although the school's income per pupil is average compared with secondary schools nationally, rigorous pursuit of priorities enables the school to provide well for pupils. A modest surplus has been accumulated which is intended to provide improved accommodation for music. The procedures and control of spending are very good and accounts are regularly audited. Use of the very small grant provided to support minority-ethnic pupils in their use of English is very well used and these pupils often achieve highly.

113. The principles of best value are applied very well. Standards compare well with those of most schools, and pupils make exceptionally good progress in Years 7 to 9 from average standards on entry to the school. Challenge is good through curricular and extra-curricular provision, which provides excellent opportunities for residential experience. Consultation with parents and with pupils enables views to be considered and, where appropriate, acted upon. Competition for services is well handled. The school gives very good value for money.

114. Provision of staff is very good, overall, and very effective in advancing pupils' learning. There is a very good match of teachers to timetabled courses. Teachers are well qualified. Both men and women hold posts of responsibility, presenting appropriate role models. The large majority of staff teach their subject specialisms. There are no teachers explicitly qualified in ICT, but teachers' knowledge and understanding of their main subjects, coupled with strong personal interest and competence, ensure that staffing for ICT is good. The provision of technicians for science and ICT is very good. There is very good provision of foreign language assistants, one for each of the languages taught, exclusively working at the school. Teacher-turnover is largely due to promotion, and governors do what they can to retain staff of high quality. There are not enough specialist teachers of religious education on roll and the school does not provide sufficiently for this subject in Years 10 and 11. Nevertheless, several non-specialists in this subject provide good quality provision of religious education in Years 7 to 9.

115. Professional training is now very good and has improved considerably since the last inspection. Training needs are defined in planning and in appraisal of performance, ensuring that school needs are met when staff enhance their skills. Valuable training has taken place of staff who support pupils with special educational needs, and has involved, for example, use of learning support assistants and knowledge of Aspergers Syndrome, inclusion and dyspraxia. Newly qualified teachers are well supported, with effective mentoring to assist their professional development.

116. There are sufficient administrative staff, who are helpful and effective in ensuring the smooth running of the school. The caretaking staff is effective and efficient in maintaining a learning environment of good quality.

117. Accommodation is good, overall, and supports learning well, but has some deficiencies. Indoor accommodation for physical education is of very good quality, extensive and varied. Buildings are generally well decorated and well maintained. Refurbishment of some laboratories is taking place and a new music suite and drama studios are scheduled. The school is moving towards a programme of planned maintenance. The library is a very pleasant area in which to work, but too small for the size of the school. Several classrooms, including some on upper floors, are only accessible through other teaching areas, making exit and entry difficult. Drainage of the playing fields is inadequate and wet weather disrupts planned activities. A particular deficiency is that some design and technology rooms are inappropriate for the delivery of the subject curriculum and are in considerable need of refurbishment. Accommodation for pupils with special educational needs in Year 7 and in groups withdrawn for special support in other years is well appointed, comfortable and supported by good computer-resources. Pupils in wheelchairs can access the whole school, although with difficulty in one area.

118. Learning resources are good and used effectively by teachers. The learning resource budget is well managed by senior staff, who ensure that resources are used efficiently and effectively in the classroom through close monitoring of teaching. Heads of department are required annually to evaluate the use of resources and how this impacts on pupils' achievement. All departments receive sufficient funding for learning resources. The school has invested a substantial amount of money in modern computers and provision is good. Networked rooms are available and areas housing computers have been made accessible to most subjects. The modern foreign language department makes very good use of the virtual language laboratory, which supports learning well.

119. The library is well managed by a committed and enthusiastic librarian who works closely with management and staff. A library policy statement and development plan are in place. Insufficient space is available to house further books and some additional 4000 texts are required for the provision to be average. The quality of the books and their physical condition are very good. The library is accessible throughout the day. Science, art, geography, history and English departments regularly make effective use of the library during lesson times or as a resource for individual use. Nevertheless, the teaching of retrieval and information skills could be further extended. The library has a bank of computers that are used well by some pupils.

120. The present headteacher was appointed since the last inspection and has made a significant, beneficial impact on the quality of education that the school provides, especially teaching. The key issue of ensuring the involvement of governors with planning and direction for the school has been very successfully resolved. Pupils with special educational needs have been provided for very well and are gaining ever more effective access to the

curriculum. The previous inspection identified staff training as a key issue for improvement and this is now very good. Learning resources have been improved substantially, and provision for information and communication technology has greatly improved. The key issue of providing a daily act of collective worship for all pupils each day has not been met.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Leadership and management***

121. Leadership of the sixth form is very good. The headteacher and senior staff provide strong direction to ensure that all students receive an education of high quality. The head of sixth form provides very committed and competent day-to-day leadership for students. The standards achieved and the satisfaction of students with the provision that they receive endorse provision as very good. Leadership ensures that students regularly achieve the standards that they should and add value to the qualifications that they gained at GCSE. In 2000, the latest year for which results have been nationally verified, students achieved the results that they should from their prior levels of attainment. In some subjects, they achieved more highly.

122. The processes of monitoring of teaching, learning and planning equal the high quality of those in the 11-16 school. The school's leadership and senior management ensure that the quality of teaching is very good. Very little teaching is not at least good, and most is very good or excellent, which is a substantial improvement on the situation found at the last inspection. Use of resource is rigorously linked to priorities in planning, as it is in the 11-16 school. Recognising weakness in the provision for A level theatre studies prior to the appointment of the present head of department, the headteacher was active in extending provision for the subject for students in Year 13 through a partnership with a neighbouring independent school. Staffing difficulties in providing for the course at Charters have been overcome by a new working relationship with the neighbouring school and this arrangement is continuing, making provision cost-effective. Observation of lessons in the partner-school during the inspection confirmed provision for these students to be of good quality. The headteacher has personally monitored provision in the neighbouring institution, and confirmed its quality. Leadership across the two schools recognises mutual advantages and an excellent working partnership has begun.

123. Leadership conveys high expectations of achievement to students and underlines that productive use of time when they are not in lessons is important to their current and future success. The head of sixth form ensures that students use their time for private study well. Appropriate oversight of the extensive common room ensures that students use this individual study time productively. This is now more necessary than in the past, because of the demands that the increased range of Year 12 subjects make upon students' time. As the common room is also the main study area, it is important that the head of sixth form ensures a purposeful, quiet working environment for private study for students there, and he does so quietly but effectively.

124. Governors provide equally effective leadership to that of the 11-16 school. They do not have a separate committee for sixth form matters, but their committees are alive to the importance of the sixth form to the life of the school as a whole. They are well aware of the initiative of joint provision with the neighbouring independent school and endorse it. Governors provide neither religious education for sixth form students, nor an act of collective worship for all students daily, though these are legal requirements.

125. Funding is used effectively. The school spends a little more of its income on the sixth form than the number of students seems to justify. The successful introduction of AS courses and maintenance of breadth of curricular opportunities for sixth form students has,

latterly, proved slightly more expensive than previously. However, the quality of provision in Years 7 to 11 has not been reduced. The principles of best value apply in the sixth form. Results indicate good value added to students' achievements between ages 16 to 18. Students regularly achieve the standards that they should, and often more highly. The curriculum and extra-curricular opportunities provide good challenge. Regular consultation is held with students, who express general satisfaction with the provision that they receive. Use of services is managed well, as in the 11 to 16 school, ensuring that competition is cost-effective and gives a good return. Value for money is very good.

### **Resources**

126. Staffing is very good. There is a very good match of staff to timetables. Teachers have good qualifications and scholarship. Their effectiveness is demonstrated by the very good results obtained by students. There is effective induction of new staff to the school. Leadership is reluctant to use non-specialist teachers of religious education to enable courses to be offered in the sixth form, although this occurs in Years 7 to 9.

127. Accommodation is good. The sixth form block is well designed and provides good, flexible accommodation to meet the additional needs of senior students. Some students use the pleasant library throughout the day for private study and research, though it is small for the needs of the whole school. There is no separate library for the sixth form. Plans to extend the library are included in the proposals for building development within the school.

128. Provision of learning resources is good. Students use the computers in the library and those in the common room extensively, and are very pleased with the rapid access to the Internet that is available to them for research. Textbooks are adequate across the curriculum.

## WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

129. To raise standards achieved by pupils in the 11 – 16 school and in the sixth form and the quality of educational provision further, the school should:

- \* Continue to ensure that pupils attain equally highly in all their GCSE subjects, by continued monitoring of teaching and learning and evaluation of results, taking action as necessary.  
*(Paragraphs: 5, 11, 194, 208, 221, 222.)*  
*This issue is identified in the school development planning.*
- \* Provide sufficient time for the provision of religious education for pupils in Years 10 and 11 to cover the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education and meet statutory requirements, by adapting the curriculum for Years 10 and 11 to do so.  
*(Paragraphs: 51, 60, 66, 136, 243, 248.)*
- \* Further improve accommodation for learning, by completing plans to improve accommodation for music and drama, refurbishing accommodation for designing and making in rooms for design and technology, extending the library to accommodate more resources, improving drainage of the playing fields and creating alternative access to classrooms to which access is presently through other classrooms.  
*(Paragraphs: 117, 158, 189, 196.)*  
*Some of these issues are already part of school development planning.*
- \* Improve the use of time when pupils are in tutor groups in the mornings, by closely monitoring use of this time.  
*(Paragraph: 52.)*

### Sixth form

- \* Provide opportunity for the provision of religious education for students in Years 12 and 13 and meet statutory requirements for religious education, by adapting the curriculum as necessary.  
*(Paragraphs: 67, 124.)*
- In addition to the key issues listed above, the school should consider including in its action plan the following issue relating to another weakness:
  - \* Provide an act of collective worship each day for all pupils and sixth form students.  
*(Paragraphs: 60, 67, 120, 124.)*



## KEY STAGE 4

130. Pupils attain above average standards by the end of Year 11. Their progress is good during this key stage and they usually achieve the standards that they should. In recent years, pupils have regularly attained well above average standards in gaining five or more GCSE subject grades of A\* to C. A high proportion of A\* and A grades are regularly attained in most subjects. Well above average results have been maintained except for 2000 when, although results were still above average, a year group of slightly lower potential did a little less well. However, standards were still in line with those of similar schools. Standards in 2001 were higher at all grade levels and in the average point score attained per pupil. In recent years, pupils have not attained such high standards in GCSE drama, history and modern foreign languages as they have in their other subjects. Results in these subjects have been average or below. Leadership has recognised pupils' under-performance in these subjects and there have been substantial changes of staff, with all these departments obtaining new leaders during the last two years. There was much evidence of improvement in the 2001 results, indicating good progress.

131. In work seen during the inspection by Year 11, pupils were achieving well. They make very good progress and achieve very well in spoken and written English, where they analyse texts very well and often write at substantial length. In mathematics, pupils achieve well, showing good skills in work in trigonometry, for example, and skill in managing equations in algebra. In science, pupils achieve very well. For example, higher attainers manage practical work very well. Pupils of lower attainment observe results and record findings successfully. From work seen in their other subjects, pupils achieve very well in art and geography. They achieve above what might reasonably be expected in lessons and current work in drama, design and technology, history, music, physical education and religious education. They are achieving at an appropriate level in information and communication technology, modern foreign languages and business.

132. In comparison with standards nationally, pupils were attaining above national standards in most subjects in the work seen during the inspection, and in line with national standards in modern foreign languages and business. Only in drama were standards below average, because the residual difficulty in providing competent staffing for the subject shows in the standards pupils currently achieve. However, Year 11 pupils are now achieving well with the newly appointed departmental head, and the situation promises improved attainment at GCSE.

133. Pupils with special educational needs, including those in the school's unit for physically impaired pupils, achieve the standards that they should. The latter receive excellent support from the unit and often achieve highly. Pupils with minority ethnic backgrounds achieve at least as well as they should, and often more highly than other pupils.

134. The attitudes of pupils in Years 10 and 11 to school and to learning are very good. In well over half the 71 lessons seen, pupils' attitudes were very good or excellent. In very few were pupils' attitudes not satisfactory and conducive to successful learning. Their behaviour is very good both in class and around the school. They act responsibly, and relationships in and out of lessons are very good.

135. Teaching is very good. Many lessons were judged very good or excellent. No unsatisfactory lessons were observed. Teachers manage pupils very well. Their subject knowledge is strong and they plan with care, which enables them to interest pupils in their lessons. As a result, pupils learn successfully and make good progress. They concentrate

well on their work in almost all classes and make a good effort to learn what teachers intend. Rarely is time wasted in lessons, although they are usually well over one hour in length. Consequently, pupils gain the knowledge, understanding and subject skills that help them to attain above average standards at GCSE.

136. The curriculum provides a good range of learning opportunities. The required National Curriculum is provided. However, provision for religious education is insufficient to meet the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus. Lower attainers are provided with additional English support as a replacement for a foreign language. Expectations are high that all pupils will achieve GCSE grades, and they do. Opportunities for work-related experience are good. Extra-curricular activities provide excellent opportunities for residential experience, at the school's centre at Tirabad or abroad. Many pupils participate in extra-curricular sport, music and large-scale productions. The current production for which pupils are rehearsing is "Grease". Support is provided out of school time to assist pupils in many of their GCSE subject courses.

137. The care, support and guidance provided for pupils are very good. Personal support is available through heads of year and tutors. Support to enable pupils to achieve their best is provided by regular tutorials on Tuesdays after school. Tutors meet each member of their tutor group on a regular basis to review the standards of their work and their current performance. Targets are set to focus improvement. The school's effective collection and analysis of data on each pupil enables tutors to have a recent profile of each person, so that strengths and weaknesses can be identified and so inform the guidance provided.

138. Links with parents are good. Parents receive informative reports and have the opportunity to meet staff at consultative meetings for parents. Parents consider that teachers know their children well and their comments are helpful. Very good links are in place with parents who have children with statements of special educational need, especially those with children in the special unit for physically impaired pupils.

139. The leadership and management of Years 10 and 11 is effective in ensuring that teaching is very good and that pupils attain standards which are consistently at least above average. Effective monitoring of teaching takes place and the quality of teaching has greatly improved since the last inspection. Pupils' views are taken into account and a recent initiative involved consulting some Year 11 higher attainers to obtain their views about what were the characteristics of the most effective teaching they received. Leadership and management use these insights in planning for change and improvement. The provision of staff, accommodation and learning resources is good. However, some classrooms can only be accessed through others, making exit and entrance difficult. Design and technology classrooms are in need of refurbishment to support learning of high quality. The library is used well, but is small for the size of the school. The playing fields are not drained well enough and weather conditions sometimes restrict outdoor activities as a result.

## **THE WORK OF THE UNIT FOR PUPILS WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS**

140. Pupils, who have undergone multi-professional assessment in line with the Code of Practice and have specific physical needs, are provided for to a very high standard through the special unit (Resource Base) located at the school. There are currently 11 pupils attached to the unit, which is funded by the local authority. It provides places for applicants from four other neighbouring local authorities. The unit is very highly regarded by parents, and attracts pupils from outside the normal catchment area. The coordinator of special educational needs oversees the unit, but its day-to-day running is in the hands of a manager and a senior welfare assistant. With the help of a dedicated team, pupils with very significant physical disabilities are fully integrated into the work and play of the school

curriculum. They experience the full range of learning opportunities and teaching and the very high quality of these, with the impressive support of welfare assistants, learning support assistants and visiting specialists, make the unit exceptionally successful and essential to the progress and well-being of the pupils involved.

141. The unit's manager and her assistant take very good care of pupils' personal and physical needs, including hygiene, medication and physiotherapy. The central location of the unit within the school buildings allows almost complete access to all areas by pupils using wheelchairs. Furnishings are continually updated and adapted. Benches and facilities have been renewed in most areas of the school where there are practical activities. The results of this very good provision are clear to see. Pupils express their contentment with the resource, which combines a number of roles. It is a club, a refuge point and a meeting point that is used well. The happiness that these pupils show when they meet as a group to enjoy their morning break with friends and staff is a tribute to the unit's success.

142. Pupils join the unit at all ages. Liaison with primary schools is very good and, before transfer, special educational needs staff spend an appreciable amount of time in primary schools, meeting pupils and becoming familiar with their needs. As sixth form students, they are able to transfer to AS and A level courses with a minimum of difficulty.

143. Provision is very appropriate and support is of a high order, continuing even when a pupil is unavoidably absent, as in a sixth form class where a support assistant took notes for an absent student. Though the support in classes is of a high order, it is often unobtrusive, in order to encourage pupils' independence and use of initiative.

144. As with all pupils on the special needs register, information on pupils in the unit is conveyed to parents and teaching staff promptly. Procedures for annual reviews meet statutory requirements and assessment is fully informed by regular monitoring of pupils' performance. The process of assessment and review is very well supported by parents. Parents express great satisfaction with the caring provision by the unit.

145. At the previous inspection it was noted that pupils in the unit who were taking the extended English course were unable to experience a modern foreign language. That is no longer the case, with pupils taking a language short course and still gaining extra time for English at Years 10 and 11.

146. The unit makes excellent provision for its students. It combines very good teaching and an impressive range of courses with a high level of care. It helps to foster very good relations among all pupils and is a strength of the school.

## **COMMUNITY LINKS**

147. There are very effective, purposeful and constructive links between the school and the local and wider community. The school provides a recreation centre, which offers extensive sports facilities to pupils and the local community. The centre is available after school and during the school holidays. The school manages adult education classes to encourage greater links with parents and to provide well-organised, worthwhile opportunities for learning to the wider community. For example, the school provides a number of opportunities for mature adults from the community to enable them to learn and develop skills in information and communication technology. Staff from the school also benefit from these courses. They support staff development and enable staff to share their skills with pupils in the classroom and further raise standards.

148. The school shares its grounds with Charters Youth and Community Centre. A number of sixth form students from the school and the youth worker manage recreational facilities for both pupils and the wider community. Pupils from the school actively participate in recreational activities during and after school.

149. Very good links are in place with the careers service, with representatives from industry and commerce, local employers, the police and local sports clubs. All work enthusiastically to support pupils' achievements, supporting them to become responsible and mature citizens. Equally positive links are in place with partner primary schools for smooth transfer of pupils at age 11, and with local universities for the training of teachers.

150. The school has recently made a substantial bid for Sports College status. If achieved, this will further raise opportunities for pupils in school, but it will also enhance existing sports and recreational facilities for the local community. This will further ensure that the school remains an integral part of the local and wider community.

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	<b>Years 7 – 11</b>	160
	<b>Sixth form</b>	79
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		71

### Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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#### Years 7 – 11

<b>Number</b>	7	58	70	25	0	0	0
<b>Percentage</b>	4	36	44	16	0	0	0

#### Sixth form

<b>Number</b>	4	38	32	5	0	0	0
<b>Percentage</b>	5	48	41	6	0	0	0

*The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. As the total number observed in sixth form is substantially less than 100, care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for the sixth form here, as each lesson represents considerably more than one percentage point.*

### Information about the school's pupils

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	<b>Y7 – Y11</b>	<b>Sixth form</b>
Number of pupils on the school's roll	1103	269
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	75	0

<b>Special educational needs</b>	<b>Y7 – Y11</b>	<b>Sixth form</b>
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	27	2
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	264	1

<b>English as an additional language</b>	<b>No of pupils</b>
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	58

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	<b>No of pupils</b>
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	29
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	22

## Attendance

### Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.8
National comparative data	7.7

### Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.3
National comparative data	1.1

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

## Attainment at the end of Key Stage 3 (Year 9)

Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2000	128	115

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	84	96	107
	Girls	99	84	89
	Total	183	180	196
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	75 (80)	74 (75)	81 (75)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	47 (47)	55 (52)	54 (44)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	87	100	99
	Girls	99	87	90
	Total	186	187	189
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 5 or above	School	77 (78)	77 (80)	78 (79)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of pupils at NC Level 6 or above	School	36(35)	52 (53)	54 (48)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (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 pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2000	137	102

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	75	134	136
	Girls	65	95	97
	Total	140	229	233
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	59 (59)	97 (96)	97 (96)
	National	59 (35)	91 (43)	43 (38)

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

	GCSE results	GCSE point score
	Average point score per pupil	School
	National	38 (38)

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
		2000	52	48

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	20.8	17.3	19.3 (18.2)	4.6	6.1	5.4 (3.4)
National	17.7	18.6	18.2 (17.9)	2.6	2.9	2.7 (2.8)

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

Vocational qualifications	Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	35
	National	73

### Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	0
Black – African heritage	4
Black – other	4
Indian	21
Pakistani	7
Bangladeshi	2
Chinese	10
White	1368
Any other minority ethnic group	56

### Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	39	3
Other minority ethnic groups	0	0

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

**Teachers and classes****Qualified teachers and classes:****YR 7 – Y11**

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	87.9
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	16.8

**Education support staff:****YR7 – Y11**

Total number of education support staff	34
Total aggregate hours worked per week	782

**Deployment of teachers:****YR7 – Y11**

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	78.2
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**Average teaching group size:****YR7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	25.8
Key Stage 4	20.2

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

**Financial information**

Financial year	2000-2001
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	£
Total income	3,796,451.00
Total expenditure	3,636,296.00
Expenditure per pupil	2,442.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	67,535.00
Balance carried forward to next year	227,690.00

**Recruitment of teachers**

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	27
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	24

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

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*



**Results of the survey of parents and carers**

**Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1472
Number of questionnaires returned	303

**Percentage of responses in each category**

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Tend to agree</b>	<b>Tend to disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>	<b>Don't know</b>
My child likes school.	38	55	6	3	1
My child is making good progress in school.	35	51	6	1	7
Behaviour in the school is good.	33	56	4	0	6
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	22	60	10	3	5
The teaching is good.	32	59	3	0	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	26	43	20	4	7
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	47	42	9	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	61	35	2	0	1
The school works closely with parents.	25	45	22	4	4
The school is well led and managed.	44	47	5	1	5
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	39	50	5	0	7
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	35	41	9	4	11

**Other issues raised by parents**

Overall, parents express strong support for the school.

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

*+Reference to similar schools is to those schools which contain a similar proportion of pupils who claim free school meals. This is considered to be a valid indicator by which to compare schools with pupils of similar backgrounds. Reference to all schools indicates all secondary schools across the country.*

### **ENGLISH**

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

#### **Strengths**

- High standards of attainment and achievement;
- The leadership and management of the head of department;
- Teaching is very good overall;
- Pupils' very good attitudes, behaviour and development in English lessons.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Continue to develop the integration of the National Literacy Strategy into programmes of work;
- Classrooms are only accessible though other rooms and lack storage space.

151. Standards of attainment are well above average at ages 14 and 16. These standards represent very good achievement by pupils in Years 7 to 9, given their average attainment on entry to the school. Thereafter, pupils continue to achieve very well and attain high standards. These judgements are consistent with the pattern of the department's results in recent years and apply to pupils of all levels of attainment and ethnic origin.

152. In 2000, pupils' performance in national tests at the end of Year 9 was well above average compared with pupils' performance nationally, and well above average in comparison with pupils in similar schools. Provisional performance figures for 2001 show a similar picture. The same pupils performed slightly better in English and science than in maths. Their average point scores continue to show a rising trend. The proportion of GCSE A\* to C grades in English and English literature in 2000 was significantly above average. In both courses, the proportion of A\* to G grades was above national averages. Provisional results for 2001 in English show a similar proportion of A\* to C grades and a higher proportion in English literature. In 2001, all pupils were awarded a grade within the range A\* to G in both subjects. Results in both years suggest that pupils achieved at least as well as should be expected. The pattern of results in previous years has largely been similar, but with a particularly high proportion of A\* to C grades in 1999 and a particularly high number of A\* grades in English in 2000. Pupils' results in English and English Literature compare favourably with performance in their other subjects.

153. In work seen during the inspection, standards are well above average at the age of 14, which represents very good achievement. There are great improvements in knowledge about language and understanding about how to use it effectively. This is as a result of the head of department's introduction of elements of the National Literacy Strategy in Years 7 to 9, well supported by choice of interesting and challenging texts. Pupils tackle specialist terms readily and use them appropriately. In one Year 7 class, for example, pupils could describe the function of similes, and built up an appropriate vocabulary to describe

characters, stimulated by their study of "Boy" by Roald Dahl. Pupils in a Year 9 class could explain 'motivation', the use of the colon, how to identify stage directions in play scripts and how illustrations provide clues about text, for example the significance of the contour lines on a map on the jacket of Berlie Doherty's, "The Shake-stone". They make very good progress in reading for understanding and in reading aloud because of the enriched reading experience they receive during these years. Extra English lessons, where necessary, provide very well for those with special educational needs. All pupils' reading is well supported by the variety of texts of good quality used in the classroom. Similarly, pupils make rapid gains in speaking in public. They often give comprehensive, extended replies to questions, so that, by the end of Year 9, they are speaking confidently and thoughtfully about, for example, the choices poets make when writing. They apply such judgements to their own work, evaluating and re-evaluating it. Creative writing is encouraged, and this is a contributory factor in this progress. Pupils have opportunities to write creatively in the classroom and in an after-school club. These bear fruit in the annual publication of an anthology and success in national poetry awards.

154. In work seen during the inspection, standards are also well above average at the age of 16. Pupils achieve at least as well as should be expected given their prior attainment, and overall they achieve very well. They continue to make gains in knowledge and understanding of challenging texts like "Macbeth", "Jane Eyre", "The Fallen Idol" and the poetry of Carol Ann Duffy and Simon Armitage. They annotate texts effectively and write about them at length. The most capable pupils produce coursework of substantial length and merit, often after earlier drafting. Pupils with special educational needs in extra English classes achieve well also. In one excellent Year 10 lesson, pupils preparing for a forthcoming visit produced an appropriate welcome and outline of activities in speech and writing, which were above the standard one might reasonably expect. Pupils continue to develop fluent, confident speaking. They read aloud expressively, including from Shakespeare's "Macbeth" in a Year 10 lesson, for example, and from Charlotte Brontë and Graham Greene in Year 11 lessons.

155. Since the last inspection, improvement has been very good. The department has raised standards of attainment and pupils achieve very well. The 'very positive attitudes' referred to in the last report are present now. There is a strong focus on learning throughout the department. Work is well chosen to suit all levels of ability. The extra English programme is very successful in raising standards for lower attainers. There has been a substantial improvement in the provision of opportunities for developing pupils' capabilities in information and communication technology and the effectiveness of teaching in this area, in response to a key issue at the last inspection. These improvements reflect the very good leadership and management of the subject.

156. The quality of teaching and learning is very good overall. A particular strength is teachers' choice of challenging texts, which make demands on pupils' understanding and provoke discussion about language, character, relationships and important moral issues. By attention to the detail of these texts, teachers raise pupils' awareness of how writing of good quality helps to explain the world we live in and provides models for their own writing. There is also particularly good teaching of basic skills so that pupils acquire the techniques they need to express themselves clearly in speech and writing. This was the case in an excellent Year 10 lesson, where the teacher's humour and uninhibited rehearsal of the formalities involved in greeting a visitor to the school enabled pupils with special educational needs to prepare effectively and achieve standards in speech and writing above expectations. Teachers expect much from their pupils, and encourage them to value and evaluate their work. As a result, they get much back in return. This was the case in a Year 11 class, where very capable pupils were reviewing the teacher's thoughtful and constructive marking of their 'comparative writing' and some were embarking on a second or even third attempt at improving its standard. In a Year 9 class, the teacher constantly dropped into the lesson

little points about drafting, re-reading, 'having too much of a good thing', dictionaries in school, checking spelling, or 'What do you do when you're finished?' As a result, pupils recognised her high expectations and responded by creative and critical involvement in each other's work, which was above expected standards. Very occasionally, a teacher's classroom control was slightly insecure, or a teacher's over-explanation and sequence of activities affected the momentum of a lesson. Usually, however, teachers conduct very well planned lessons with a variety of activities at a very good pace, and pupils learn correspondingly very well as a result.

157. Pupils' attitudes and learning are very good overall. A small group of pupils with special educational needs in Year 7 worked hard and with keen interest on building up information and developing the vocabulary to write about a cat. A Year 9 class worked very well together in evaluating their own and others' poetry and were very appreciative of each other's achievements. Another Year 9 class followed the teachers' reading of a Jane Gardham story with close attention. Their concentration enabled them to explain the story and understand the importance of detail in the writing. A Year 10 class studying "Macbeth" enacted the banquet-scene with enthusiasm, and even non-participants enjoyed the heightened sense of drama produced by the 'players'. Pupils in a Year 11 class worked hard on their study of Carole Ann Duffy's poems; they worked well together in groups and were particularly attentive to presentations made by group representatives. Although there were occasional examples of inattentive or distracting behaviour, no disruptive or bad behaviour occurred in any of the lessons observed. This reflects teachers' good control of and very good relationships with pupils.

158. The head of department has the wisdom to preserve what is important, while adjusting to new developments. He ensures consistency of approach and the maintenance of high standards throughout a large team of committed colleagues. Accommodation is satisfactory, but some classrooms are accessible only through other rooms, restricting the exit and entrance of pupils.

### **Literacy across the curriculum**

159. The quality of contributions made by all subjects to standards of literacy is very good overall, and the strategies for improving literacy standards are very effective. The National Literacy Strategy has been developed well, and the school needs to maintain its impetus. More often than not, subjects provide very good opportunities for pupils to practise literacy skills. In science, for example, discussions and presentations promote speaking and listening skills. Pupils acquire a good scientific vocabulary because teachers use it and encourage its use both in spoken and written work. Pupils take notes effectively and write clearly with good presentation. Teachers carry out the literacy policy and help to improve standards of literacy as a result. In mathematics, standards of presentation are very high as a result of teachers' expectations and corrections of written work. Many opportunities are provided for speaking and pupils respond fully to questions. Reading, note-making and writing opportunities occur frequently, with good attention being paid to appropriate mathematical vocabulary. As a result, standards of literacy are higher than usually observed in mathematics. In history, there is systematic reinforcement of key subject words. Pupils are encouraged to develop what they have to say in question and answer sessions. A wide variety of writing occurs within a structured framework, including extended writing. Teachers' marking encourages accuracy in written work. Standards of literacy are high as a result, in particular pupils' listening skills. Religious education provides some reading but more writing opportunities, with frequent extended writing reaching above average standards.

160. Discussion work is a strong feature and pupils develop balanced argument and analytical skills particularly well, reaching high standards. In physical education, teachers correct spelling in copied work and in pupils' own writing. They encourage pupils to make notes and use the correct vocabulary, and therefore contribute effectively to the development of literacy skills. As a result, standards are high. In modern foreign languages, pupils' writing develops from single words through sentences and paragraphs to extended writing by the end of Year 9. Speaking, too, is above average at this age, though less confident in Years 10 and 11. Listening skills, however, are above average throughout. These standards arise from teachers' good use of the foreign language, their teaching of basic skills, and their emphasis on the importance of effective communication in speech and writing. Overall, pupils develop their literacy skills very well, and these skills enable them to learn more effectively in all subjects.

## MATHEMATICS

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

### Strengths

- Results are consistently above national averages;
- Teaching is good;
- All pupils behave well, have positive attitudes to learning and work hard;
- The standard of work which pupils produce is above average and they are achieving well;
- The department is well managed and teachers work well as a team.

### Areas for improvement

- Continue to integrate the National Numeracy Strategy into subjects' schemes of work.

161. Standards of attainment on entry to the school are broadly in line with the national averages. Pupils make very good progress and achieve very well by the end of Year 9. Their results are well above average in National Curriculum tests at the end of Year 9. Both boys and girls do very well. In recent years until 2000, the proportion of pupils reaching the expected level was well above average, and the proportion achieving the higher level was also well above the national figures. Results in 2001 were even stronger. Pupils' overall performance in mathematics is very slightly below that of English and science, although results are above the expected averages for similar schools.

162. Pupils make very good progress between the ages of 14 and 16, and their GCSE results are consistently above the national average. The proportion of pupils gaining GCSE A\* to C grades in 2000 was an impressive ten per cent above the average for all schools and compared well with results in similar schools. Standards were higher in 2001. Irrespective of their levels of attainment when they begin GCSE courses, pupils achieve well. Their performance in mathematics was not significantly different from the average of the other subjects for which they enter. Girls and boys performed above the national averages. The proportion of pupils achieving the highest GCSE grades of A\* and A is above average. Almost all pupils gained a grade within the A\* to G range.

163. During the inspection, the standard of work seen in all lessons was at least as high as it should be for pupils of all ethnic backgrounds and levels of attainment. By Year 9, lower-attaining pupils accurately find the areas of triangles and rectangles. Higher attainers in the same year solve simultaneous equations by simplification and substitution. By Year 11, lower-attaining pupils identify the edges, faces and vertices of two- and three-dimensional shapes. Higher attainers in the same year apply trigonometric ratios to right-angled triangles, and solve equations involving sine, cosine and tangents. All teachers are satisfied only with high levels of attention and participation. They always involve the pupils and manage the classroom effectively. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress as a result of the provision made for them, as do those identified by the school as talented in the subject. From Year 7 onwards, all pupils are taught in classes with pupils of similar attainment. Lower-attaining pupils and those with special learning needs benefit greatly from smaller numbers in their classes, and they make very good progress as a result.

164. Improvement has been good since the last inspection. At that time, standards by the end of Year 9 were well above national averages. These high standards have been maintained, with both lower and higher attainers achieving well. GCSE standards have improved since the last inspection, when weaknesses were found in work seen in lessons. This inspection's findings are an improvement on those of the last inspection. There have been several changes in staff since the time of the last inspection. The overall quality of teaching has much improved since the last inspection, when significant weaknesses were found in a quarter of lessons seen. All of the shortcomings identified have been successfully addressed. Much better use is now made of information and communication technology.

165. The teaching of mathematics is good overall. Many very good lessons were seen during this inspection. Some excellent teaching was also seen. The consistency of the teaching is a significant strength, with a high proportion of good lessons seen throughout. The non-specialist mathematicians make a valuable contribution to the high standards seen.

166. Teachers have good subject knowledge and understanding of the way in which pupils develop basic skills. Their use of language is concise, as in Year 8 lessons on probability and transformations. Lesson planning is good and lessons routinely fully involve all pupils. Teachers enjoy very good relationships with pupils, who respond very well because teachers engage them in purposeful, clear and interesting tasks. Planning for investigative work is now good, an improvement since the findings last time, as seen in a lesson for higher-attaining Year 11 pupils exploring the graphical representation of functions. Good use is made of information and communication technology. Standards of literacy are very good, and teachers' expectations in this are consistently high, especially regarding the presentation of written work, as with pupils of all levels of attainment in Year 10. There are many planned opportunities to develop pupil's speaking in public, as in a Year 9 lesson on simultaneous equations. Formal assessment, including for those with special educational needs, is good. Marking is now a real strength and informs pupils of what they need to do to improve. Teachers respect pupils' efforts, as shown in a Year 10 lesson on algebra. The effective aspects of assessment are aided by teachers' awareness of pupils' prior attainment. Reports on progress over the year are good. Pupils value homework, and this is regularly set, making a positive contribution to the good progress made by individuals. The organisation of classrooms, so that all pupils are able to work well, is often very good. The subject benefits from improved access to information technology.

167. Pupils' behaviour and attitudes are very good. All lessons are characterised by an atmosphere of purposeful activity. Good opportunities are provided for pupils to work effectively together, and pupils are not over-reliant on the teacher. The department makes very good provision for pupils to catch up on work that they have missed or are finding difficult.

168. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. Standards are improving, and, since the last inspection, very good progress has been made in tackling all of the shortcomings then identified. In particular, the overall quality of teaching has improved significantly.

### **Numeracy across the curriculum**

169. Overall, pupils' standards of numeracy are above average. They apply their numerical skills well in mathematics and in other subjects, as required. The National Numeracy Strategy has been applied in the school from the current term. The programme has been well planned, and all subjects have identified areas to which they can contribute in extending pupils' numerical skills. Given the recent implementation of the Strategy, provision is yet to be formally monitored and evaluated and practice needs to be fully embedded in the work of all subjects.

170. In science, pupils' skills are competent enough for them to tabulate the percentage of gases in the air and understand the concept of distance between the planets. In geography, pupils' skills are particularly well developed. They measure time and angles in both scale and compass-work. They are familiar with co-ordinates, latitude and longitude and apply the necessary numerical skills needed well. They handle flood hydrographs successfully in their interpretation of the activity of rivers. They collect, analyse and use data effectively in surveys, constructing charts and line, column and pie graphs. In physical education, pupils handle data confidently and accurately when measuring and tabulating heart rates, and manipulate numbers well in their work on distances, lengths and times. In information and communication technology, pupils handle numerical data confidently and competently when working with spreadsheets. They use their numerical skills well in modern foreign languages to count, calculate, tell the time, use weights, measures and money, and interpret rail and air timetables accurately. In design and technology, pupils complete drawings accurately, and measurement is highlighted as an essential part of practical work. In art, they work on proportions in drawing, further extending their numerical perspectives very well.

## SCIENCE

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

### Strengths

- Pupils of all backgrounds and levels of competence make very good progress and achieve very well;
- Equality of opportunity is central to departmental action;
- Standards are well above the national average at age 14 and age 16, and well above the standards of similar schools;
- Teaching is very good overall, sometimes with excellent features. It promotes very good attitudes in pupils, very good response to homework and high standards of discipline;
- The head of faculty is a highly effective leader and manager, providing very clear educational direction;
- Assessment information is used very productively to monitor pupils' progress and achievements and to provide additional support and guidance as appropriate.

### Areas for improvement

- Continue to develop the use of information and communication technology by building on the very good improvements made since the last inspection;
- Continue to raise standards in biology to bring them in line with those reached in the chemistry and physics components of the GCSE co-ordinated science course.

171. Achievement by the end of Year 9 and Year 11 is very good. Progress is equally good. In work seen, standards in Year 7 are average, but standards are well above average by Year 9. The highest attaining 14 year-olds have a good understanding of the reactivity series of metals. They can predict chemical reactions and use chemical formulae to work out balanced symbol equations effectively. They understand the feeding relationships in a pyramid of numbers, but are not challenged to explain how these relationships affect population size. They relate the cellular structure of organs to the associated life processes successfully, for example in work on the structure and function of flowering plants. The lowest attaining Year 9 pupils reach the national average by, for example, investigating and then explaining how the current in an electrical circuit can be altered. In the three years from 1998 to 2000, boys achieved a higher average point score than girls in national tests. In the work seen, however, there is no significant variation between the performance of boys and girls. They achieve equally well, whether in higher or lower sets or in mixed-ability groups. Pupils with minority-ethnic backgrounds, pupils with special educational needs, and pupils whose first language is not English all achieve very well.

172. There is a very strong and successful emphasis on equality of opportunity in the science faculty with very good results, as performance in national tests and examinations confirms. In Year 9 National Curriculum tests in 1999 and 2000, pupils attained well above average results in comparison with all schools and similar schools. Performance in the tests is usually well in line with pupils' results in English and mathematics. In 2001, the unendorsed results in National Curriculum tests continue to be very strong, especially at the higher levels of attainment. Some pupils achieved level 8 and a few attained the exceptional level of performance.

173. Achievement at the end of Year 11 is very good. All groups of pupils achieve very well. They build very successfully on their high performances at age 14. The highest attainers in Year 11 gain full marks in their GCSE coursework investigations. They develop



excellent skills of interpretation, analysis and evaluation, making very good use of information and communication technology to support their analyses. The lowest attainers in Year 11 find these skills more difficult to master, but they successfully plan, obtain evidence and record results. In work in physics on energy and power, the highest attainers in Year 11 understood well converting gravitational potential to kinetic energy, and supported their understanding with mathematical calculations. From first principles, they can derive the equation to calculate the efficiency of, for example, a light bulb. In the lowest-attaining Year 11 group, of whom over half have special educational needs, all are achieving very well and should attain a GCSE double award modular science grade. They worked hard in a lesson to consolidate their understanding of the ways in which animals adapt to their environments, and the ways that humans affect the environment. This lesson confirms the very important contribution that well-planned revision makes to promoting the very good achievements of lower-attainers.

174. Standards in GCSE double award science in 2000 were well above the average for all schools and for similar schools. Results were higher than those for mathematics, and marginally higher than those for English. In the GCSE examinations last summer, all pupils took double-award science. The unendorsed results continue to be well above average, with significant improvements in the proportion of pupils reaching the highest A\* and A grades, and no pupils graded below F. Excellent analyses by the head of science have identified the successes and weaknesses in each of the Year 11 teaching groups last year, and remedial action has been taken, for example, to raise the standard of biology within the GCSE course. In 2001, boys performed better than girls. However, differences are not usually outside the range found nationally. There was no significant variation in the achievements of boys and girls seen during the inspection.

175. The science faculty has been very successful in upholding the very high standards reported at the time of the last inspection, when it was judged to be very efficient and effective. Standards then, at ages 14 and 16, were well above average. Curricular plans and use of resources were models of good practice. There has been no fall in these high standards in the last five years. Especially successful has been the improved use of information and communication technology.

176. The quality of teaching is very good, with no significant differences between teaching in Years 7 to 9 and Years 10 to 11. Of the 18 lessons seen, almost all teaching was at least good with nearly all having very good features. Pupils in this large faculty derive great benefit from being taught by very well qualified specialists, who bring a richness and depth of knowledge and experience to benefit pupils. Occasionally the full range of teaching skills is deployed to such a consistently high standard that pupils' achievements in these lessons are excellent. In these very successful lessons, teachers make excellent use of grouping pupils according to their attainment in science, planning activities that are very well matched to the needs of the highest, the average and the lowest attainers. Their teaching emphasises the importance of equality of opportunity for the wide-ranging groups of pupils in the school. Their methods are motivating, thought-provoking and fun, and they actively involve all pupils and engage their interest.

177. Monitoring and assessment of progress during and at the end of these lessons provide both teacher and pupils with a clear picture of how well the topic has been learned, and where gaps still remain to be followed up next lesson. In a Year 8 lesson on sound, for example, with a mix of higher and average-attaining pupils, the teacher used a cathode ray oscilloscope that fascinated them. An interesting selection of CD-ROMs and a game of Juke Box Jury were also included, proving to be great fun and very successful in helping pupils to distinguish the pattern of sounds. They were helped to evaluate, using appropriate scientific vocabulary, the difference between noise and music. In another example of excellent teaching and learning with Year 11 pupils, all of whom should attain very high GCSE grades,

the teacher skilfully asked questions to evaluate pupils' prior level of understanding of energy. Methods and resources were then used to make pupils think about the design of their experiments, promoting the use of computers and sensors to help develop their practical skills. They used mathematical calculations and group discussion to deepen their understanding of the conversion of gravitational potential energy to kinetic energy.

178. Very occasionally the less experienced teachers are not as successful as their more experienced colleagues in managing large classes. They do not use questions as well to give appropriate challenges to higher and lower-attaining pupils in the same class. In a Year 7 introduction to the solar system, for example, planning and questions did not adequately take account of the different starting points of pupils on entry to the school.

179. The curriculum is very well planned to meet and add richness to the statutory requirements for science, giving students a very good balance of theory and practical work. The marking of practical work is very thorough and accurate, and pupils receive very good guidance on how to improve their investigations. Pupils are very positive about learning science and they make very good use of homework to extend their knowledge and understanding. They are good listeners in lessons and respect each other's contributions. Their behaviour during practical work is very sensible and they know how to work safely, as, for example, in a Year 8 practical lesson on oxidation when burning magnesium ribbon.

180. The new head of faculty, appointed two years ago, provides very strong and highly effective leadership. She has a very clear overview of achievements, academic targets and relative strengths and weaknesses in provision because the monitoring of progress and achievements is very well established. For the future, the faculty has already identified the need to continue developing and assessing the use of information and communication technology, and to continue to improve the standard of biology within GCSE co-ordinated science, to bring achievements in this subject into line with those for chemistry and physics. This inspection confirms that these are the two key areas for development.

## ART AND DESIGN

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

### Strengths

- Consistently good and much very good teaching and learning;
- Well above average GCSE results over several years;
- Excellent displays of students' work.

### Areas for improvement

- Resources for and use of information and communication technology;
- Condition of the sinks in rooms A7 and A8;
- Provision of dedicated space for sixth form art.

181. By the end of Year 9, pupils' achievement in relation to their attainment on entry to the school is good. They progress well in Years 7 to 9. Most pupils attain at least average standards in a good variety of media by Year 9. Their knowledge and understanding of colour theory, tone, perspective, proportion, artists and styles are satisfactory. Their sketchbooks provide good evidence of steadily developing basic skills in art and good productivity. Pupils gain sound experience in two and three-dimensions, and have a good understanding of a wide range of subject vocabulary.

182. By the end of Year 11, standards are above average, representing very good achievement from the end of Year 9. Knowledge, skills and understanding of painting and drawing and the expressive qualities of art are well developed. GCSE results over recent years have been consistently well above national averages. Within the GCSE A\* to C grade range, boys results have been above national standards but not as high as those of girls, as is the case nationally. Subject performance indicators show that pupils perform better in art than in most of their other subjects.

183. Since the last inspection, art and design has maintained its position as a very good department, and by the addition of a very good technician has improved significantly. Pupils achieve well, especially in Years 10 and 11 as a result of good and often very good teaching.

184. Teaching is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11. Teachers have high levels of knowledge and understanding and a range of highly developed artistic skills, because of which they obtain respect from the pupils. Pupils are always especially interested when teachers demonstrate some aspect of the work in hand, as they often do very effectively and skilfully. Their control and management of pupils is very good. Pupils are particularly well behaved and orderly and respond very well to teachers so that the environment for learning is very good, despite crowding at times in lessons for lower year groups. Teachers mark pupils' work well, with grades for achievement and effort that are well understood by the pupils. Helpful comments enable them to understand what they need to do to improve their standard, and they therefore have good self-knowledge of their learning. Targets are set in lessons and for homework, which further support the drive for higher standards. Pupils work with good concentration in all years and increasingly take responsibility for their own learning. For example, the sketchbooks of Year 11 pupils include very good research into the work of a number of artists such as Rothko, Miro and Picasso, with very good studies based on their styles. Visits to galleries, such as the Tate Modern and the Victoria and Albert Museum, have stimulated and inspired many pupils' work. All pupils learn equally successfully; those with special educational needs and those with

ethnic-minority backgrounds do well. Talented pupils make good progress in the subject and attain highly.

185. This very good picture of provision in art has not come about by chance. It is rather the outcome of very good leadership and management in the subject, and the concerted and well-directed efforts by a group of very competent teachers.

## DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

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

### Strengths

- Results at GCSE are regularly above the national average;
- Very good teaching and high quality technical and support staff;
- Effective use of data to analyse results and improve outcomes;
- Improved use of information and communication technology.

### Areas for improvement

- The quality of the accommodation;
- Wider use of National Curriculum levels for pupils in Years 7, 8 and 9 to help them to understand their standard better;
- Enable pupils to manage time better at GCSE, through common practice across the department;
- Update the departmental handbook.

186. Provision for design and technology is good rather than very good, because very good teaching and learning is hampered by the quality of accommodation in outdated workshops and studios. Pupils achieve well above expectations by the end of Year 9. Teachers' planning builds on pupils' previous learning very well. During Years 7 to 9, pupils are not given their National Curriculum levels to help them judge their standard and motivate them. However, they work successfully with a range of materials, including food, graphics, resistant materials and textiles. They generally use literacy and numeracy skills well throughout their studies and continually use well-planned, high-level work with computers to enhance their understanding and presentation. Year 8 made good use of Junior Pin Point to capture data and analyse views of their target-group of potential customers on pizza designs. Pupils cut, shape, join and combine materials and make good quality products as a result of their well-guided designing. Innovative projects, such as Charters Wharf, give pupils an imaginary thought-provoking context. This provides a good challenge for them to design, work to scale, using creative writing, isometric drawing and teamwork to produce house-models of good quality. Pupils asked searching questions about their own models and learned much from the work of the group. Girls' achieve particularly well in Years 7, 8, and 9. All pupils with special educational needs make good progress towards the targets of their individual education plans. Pupils from different ethnic backgrounds achieve equally well with other pupils.

187. Pupils achieve well by the end of Year 11 and build effectively on their work from the end of Year 9. In Years 10 and 11, most pupils choose to work in one medium. Choice of material is completely open and there is no gender-bias, but in general fewer girls select resistant materials and graphics. Pupils use tools and machines increasingly well. Their skills are enhanced as work becomes more challenging. However the drawing skills of most pupils develop late, and the drawings of some are still immature by the time they reach GCSE. This, and their difficulty in meeting deadlines, causes disappointment for these pupils in the outcomes of final examinations. The department has worked to overcome this problem, and pupils in food technology and textiles have become more successful in meeting deadlines. All pupils have access to the examination board's criteria for judging the quality of their work, and many make very good use of this information to improve their designing and making. They use computers well and their competent, detailed research helps pupils reach the higher grades.

188. During the last three years, the trend in design and technology results has been consistently above the national average. The four subjects within design and technology have performed differently at the GCSE grade A\* to C level. Food has maintained a steady improvement. Textile technology has been above average, though results dipped in 2000. Both subjects maintained good performance, in comparison with the other subjects that pupils take at GCSE. Results in resistant materials and graphics have been more erratic. Attainment in both graphics and resistant materials has been below that of pupils' other subjects at GCSE, partly adversely influenced by unsatisfactory accommodation for designing. Nevertheless, pupils with special educational needs, including those for whom English is not their first language do very well at GCSE, often getting their best result in design and technology.

189. Improvement from the previous inspection in 1996 is good. Curricular planning, teaching methods, choices and target setting were identified as problems in 1996. Since then, effective planning, good monitoring of teaching and supportive departmental leadership have contributed to improved attainment. Use of computers has improved considerably, but it remains a continuing priority, because computer-aided manufacture is in process of development. Accommodation remains unsatisfactory. Departmental accommodation is separated within the school and this creates communication problems for the department. The organisation and design of rooms has an adverse impact on achievement, particularly so on the development of pupils' drawing skills, access to materials and teaching. In addition, space in the classroom for work in textiles constrains pattern-layout, cutting, joining and embellishing fabric, given the large size of some lower school classes. Any use of adjacent rooms to give more space creates difficulties in supervision and ensuring safety.

190. Teaching is very good overall. In all lessons, teachers' very good subject knowledge is skilfully transmitted through lively explanations and demonstrations. Teachers plan carefully to meet the needs of all pupils, including those with special educational needs and pupils from a range of cultural backgrounds. All achieve equally well. Teachers inspire pupils to learn, and set the standards expected through a wide range of teaching styles that totally engage learners. Year 7 pupils prepared carefully for the use of a video on healthy eating at the start of their research. There followed a fast and energetic range of group and whole-class activities that made learning rigorous but fun. There was a healthy competitive atmosphere, with pupils on the edge of their seats in anticipation and a thirst for learning. Similarly in Year 11 textiles, the challenge of designing and making fashionable nightwear led to a productive discussion on fabrics, costs and safety. Probing questions challenge pupils' ideas and plans. In some graphics lessons, girls are less at ease in answering and participating, so teachers are adapting specialist rooms more to girls' preferences. Very effective teaching almost compensates in some rooms for their unsatisfactory design. In a Year 10 lesson, pupils were cramped into an unsuitable space for graphics, but innovative teaching, with pupils reporting back on their findings from individual research, ensured successful learning. However, lack of space, lack of drawing boards and other equipment impeded progress. Homework is well planned and helps pupils to take their learning forward out of the classroom. Some pupils have difficulty in organising and managing their time well enough to make the progress that they could in Years 10 and 11. Many methods have been tried, but these have not yet become standard practice across the department.

191. Leadership of the department is very good. Effective use is made of data to inform practice. The two team leaders work closely together and overcome some of the disadvantages of split accommodation. There is good design practice common to the whole department. Accommodation is out of date and requires refurbishing to enable pupils to achieve more highly.

## DRAMA

Overall, the quality of provision in drama is now **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- The work of pupils at the age of 14 is above expectations. Boys and girls achieve similar standards.
- Their work in drama complements their English studies by emphasising speaking and listening skills.
- Teaching is good. Teachers use their own dramatic skills to inspire and motivate pupils.

### Areas for improvement

- GCSE results are below average and below the standards that pupils achieve in their other subjects.
- Pupils' written work at the end of Year 11 is insufficient and below average.

192. Pupils aged 14 reached above average expectations in lessons seen. They understand important techniques such as 'freeze' and can use them effectively. They work well together to devise and perform simple improvisations. Their work in English is strengthened by their good understanding of ideas such as 'dramatic tension' and how this might be achieved on stage. Both boys and girls achieve similarly good standards.

193. Though the proportion of A\* to C grades was above average in the 1999 GCSE examinations, it has declined since then and is now somewhat below average. The number of A\* and A grades is generally below average, though almost all pupils, including those with special educational needs, obtain a grade. Pupils do not attain as well in drama as in their other subjects. Fewer boys have taken drama and their results show that they do not perform as well as girls. Pupils attain well in practical work but these standards are not matched in their writing. This weakness is reflected in pupils' coursework and their writing in exercise books. The quantity of work that they have done is small and there is limited evaluative and analytical writing. However, teachers are now setting written work regularly in class and for homework. Help with examination technique for the theoretical papers is now included in the schemes of work. In lessons, Year 11 pupils evaluate their work well and, as a result, improve it. Their performance skills are good. Year 10 pupils are still hesitant but are beginning to understand how to translate ideas into movement and gesture. The two classes in Year 10 are either mainly boys or mainly girls, a situation which arose from option choices, and the boys are currently not achieving as well as the girls. Standards and achievement at the end of Year 11 in recent years have been below average and unsatisfactory. However, achievement of the current Year 11 is now satisfactory.

194. Whilst the above average standards in Years 7 to 9 have been maintained since the last inspection, the decline in examination results means that there has been no improvement in Years 10 and 11. However, there are indications that improvement has now begun.

195. Teaching is always sound and most is good or very good. Though teachers in Years 7 to 9 have other major responsibilities, they teach drama with enthusiasm and understanding. Pupils are always encouraged to expand their answers because the teacher will ask for an example or further explanation. Teachers have good performance skills and so pupils in a Year 9 class were absorbed by a mime of a mother dealing with a teenager's

untidy bedroom. As a result, pupils appreciated the drama inherent in an ordinary situation. Good planning and clear objectives result in varied activities and a progressive build-up of skills. Pupils always respond well to the challenge of working out ideas in a short space of time. Only when the pace is steady rather than brisk is there some slackening of concentration. Pupils with special educational needs make the same good progress as other pupils and enjoy participating in all activities. Pupils who speak English as an additional language benefit from the understanding that practical work brings and the links to language that teachers regularly make.

196. The new head of department has revitalised the subject. Schemes of work have been revised and all teachers are evaluating them. Homework has been closely linked to lessons and, when set, it is relevant to the theme. In conjunction with the music department, the first school production for three years, "Grease", is now in rehearsal. Pressure on accommodation means an unsuitable room has to be used, but this disadvantage is shared as much as possible. A new drama studio is already being planned.

197. To improve further, standards of written work need to rise to the levels found in practical work. The achievement of boys is good at the end of Year 9, but it needs to be raised in Years 10 and 11. The current option system, which produces classes with a heavy imbalance of one gender, is not helpful in engaging the interest of all who may be interested. Since the last inspection, standards have fluctuated and there have been periods of interrupted teaching. Though improvement overall has not been satisfactory, there is every indication of future success.

## **GEOGRAPHY**

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

### **Strengths**

- The quality of teaching;
- Assessment of pupils' performance;
- Support for pupils with statements of special educational needs;
- Leadership and the capacity to improve.

### **Areas for improvement**

- To continue the improvement of teaching techniques through the sharing of good practice.

198. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school at age 11 is average. During Years 7 to 9, they achieve well and by the end of Year 9, their attainment is above average. Work seen and lessons observed during the inspection confirm their above average attainment, which is further supported by the very high teachers' assessments of pupils' standards by the end of Year 9. In Year 7, basic geographical and number skills are put in place and pupils become familiar with measurement of time and angle, in compass and scale work, as illustrated by a piece of work called, 'a map of my lunch'. Pupils are able to refine their skills in computing by using exercises involving latitude and longitude.

199. Pupils' written skills develop well and a number of writing styles are in use. They develop and refine their investigative techniques, learning how to use transects. They also learn how to make judgements based on evidence, such as the advantages and disadvantages of different types of safari. Pupils on the register of special educational needs and pupils from ethnic-minority backgrounds are fully included in work and make good progress in line with other pupils.

200. Overall, pupils' attainment on entry to Year 10 is above average. They continue to achieve well while following their GCSE courses and, at the end of Year 11, their attainment is above average. They develop a very good understanding of geographical processes and patterns, and also of more complex concepts, seen in interpretation of statistics of populations and the consequences of different age-structures on society. Pupils learn how to gather and analyse data, draw hypotheses and reach accurate conclusions. These skills were seen in good coursework on Windsor and in fieldwork in Wales. Written work is polished and pupils use a good technical vocabulary. Presentation of work, much of it benefiting from their skills with information and communication technology, is of a high standard, particularly that of girls.

201. Apart from 2000, when GCSE results were in line with the national average, attainment of GCSE grades A\* to C grades has been well above average for girls and boys. In 1999 and 2001, attainment of grades A\* to C was high. Results in gaining A\* to G grades were above average in 2000, but in line in 1999 and 2001. Attainment of the A\* grade has been more erratic, being below average in 2000 but above in 1999 and high in 2001. Overall, pupils do as well in geography as in most of their other subjects.

202. There have been some significant improvements since the last inspection. Apart from the dip in 2000, GCSE results have improved, and the manner in which pupils work has played a part in this. In 1996, pupils had few opportunities to discuss their work. Now they work well in pairs and groups, sharing information and helping each other. Teaching promotes successful learning in all lessons rather than in most as at the last inspection. As a result, progress in lessons is good at all ages, unlike in 1996. The previous report noted that there were insufficient demands on higher attainers, but this is not now the case. Higher attaining pupils are clearly identified and extension work is provided. Overall, the work of the department is now carefully monitored and an experienced team is developing a wide range of skills.

203. Most teaching is good and much is very good across all years. No teaching is unsatisfactory. Teachers involve pupils from the start through good planning and timing of lessons. Probing questions ensure that pupils concentrate, work hard and make good use of a variety of activities and resources to keep interest at high levels. Pupils' knowledge is constantly reinforced by repetition and good plenary sessions. Pupils are able to consolidate and develop new skills at all stages of their studies. Expectations are high and apply to all, regardless of ethnicity, gender or attainment. Pupils are given classwork and homework that both stimulates them and challenges them to use initiative. Everyone is expected to contribute to the progress of the lesson. Good humour abounds in lessons and encourages good relationships, which in turn help to create a friendly environment in which pupils can develop an enthusiasm for geography. Pupils with special educational needs, whether supported by learning support assistants or not, are fully included in all lessons and make good progress. This was apparent in a Year 7 lesson in which a pupil with literacy problems was making good progress in an exercise using a computer.



204. Leadership is very good. Progress since the last inspection has been good, partly because more effective systems have been introduced. Very good academic monitoring and assessment support pupils' progress well. Their progress is carefully tracked and under-achievers are supported. As a result, pupils have confidence and trust in their teachers and a very good attitude to the work of the subject. They behave well, respond positively and work competitively.

## HISTORY

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

### Strengths

- The teaching of history is good, with some very good features; it is well planned and managed. Teachers are enthusiastic and knowledgeable;
- Use of information and communication technology to develop pupils' research and study skills;
- Very positive relationships that encourage and support learning;
- Good use of displays of pupils' work to create a good learning environment for the subject.

### Areas for improvement

- Continue to ensure improvement in GCSE results, by further review of the curriculum in Years 10 and 11.

205. Pupils' attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is broadly average. Standards of attainment at the age of 14 are well above the expected level, judged by teachers' assessments of National Curriculum levels. At GCSE, pupils' attainment is a little higher than the national average. GCSE results in 2001 showed almost two-thirds of pupils attaining A to C grades. This was a substantial increase on the result of 2000. Boys have usually attained higher standards than girls at GCSE, unlike the situation found nationally.

206. Observation of lessons and analysis of pupils' work confirm that by the end of Year 9, attainment is above the national expectation. All pupils make good progress in their first three years in the school. They develop a wide range of subject skills, including interpretation of evidence, prioritising of historical issues and the understanding of chronology. They are able to use a wide range of materials including thematic worksheets, pictorial evidence, timelines, writing frames, card-packs and a range of primary and secondary evidence. Their handling of different forms of historical data is impressive, and pupils are able to work effectively as individuals or in pairs and groups to develop their understanding of history. Pupils use historical sources well. They decide their order of importance to the subject in hand and make judgements about their reliability. Pupils in Year 7 show good understanding of chronology when constructing timelines of events leading to the establishment of the Roman Empire. By Year 8, pupils have refined their judgement, with close analysis of the causes of sixteenth century poverty. By the end of Year 9, pupils analyse the complex social issues of eighteenth century factory conditions successfully. They extend their understanding well through paired and group discussion and through good observation of a range of factory illustrations. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress in line with other pupils, because their teachers and learning support

assistants know them well and provide effective guidance in lessons. Higher-attaining pupils make good progress, particularly through their oral contributions in class. Pupils use information and communication technology extremely well at all ages, supporting their understanding of the subject and ensuring a high level of presentation of work.

207. Pupils continue to make good progress in Years 10 and 11 and achieve well in lessons. Attainment at GCSE has been broadly average in recent years, but there was a marked improvement in results in 2001. By the end of Year 11, pupils develop their skills effectively and achieve well in lessons. For example, they can explain why things happen, analyse evidence and develop their own explanations for events. They acquire study skills well in preparation for group presentations. They use library-materials and information and communication technology well. Good progress was seen in a Year 11 class studying how America moved suddenly from boom to bust. Pupils were able to identify the causes and effects of the economic collapse. The teacher used balloons which were burst to emphasise the sudden change in economic circumstances; this approach was highly effective in reinforcing the historical factors involved. In lessons seen, girls and boys of all ethnic backgrounds and those with wide-ranging special educational needs make good progress.

208. There has been good improvement since the last inspection in the quality of the teaching. The wider range of teaching methods used and the strengthening of the depth and range of resources have supported this improvement. The monitoring of the new head of department is now very effective in ensuring that teaching is good and often very good. The trend in standards since the last inspection at both key stages has been one of steady improvement. GCSE results have not improved at the rate seen in most other subjects, especially in the performance of girls, but the improvement in 2001 results was significant.

209. Teaching is good overall, and it is very good in many lessons. A similarly strong profile of teaching applies to all years. Teachers know their subject very well. They have an obvious love for it and this commitment is strongly communicated to pupils, providing a firm basis for learning. Lessons are well planned and teachers use a wide range of methods that support learning well. They help pupils to use evidence effectively. Key subject words, such as enclosure and inflation, are very well explained so that pupils develop a good understanding of why many people were poor in the sixteenth century. Teachers lead discussion effectively, helping pupils to clarify the importance, for instance, of Boulton and Watt to industrial change. The wide variety of methods encourages and develops pupils' historical understanding and overall enjoyment of the subject. Many lessons begin by reinforcing pupils' previous knowledge and understanding through an effective use of well-considered questions. Time is never wasted in lessons because teachers use a wide range of appropriate activities throughout. Homework is set regularly and marking is well focused, supporting progress, learning and achievement. All pupils are fully engaged in lessons, and teachers' good management skilfully enables those of all levels of attainment to explore a wide range of ideas before moving to draw conclusions.

210. Pupils learn successfully. They behave very well, with high concentration and focus. Very good relationships underpin learning because pupils listen intently to each other and work well together in all years. In several lessons, pupils worked very effectively in mixed pairs, a method of organisation thoughtfully employed by the department, mindful of supporting the attainment of both girls and boys. In Year 10, pupils worked very well in groups, discussing the different strategies used by the Nazis to extend their power. They entered into animated discussion, analysed the evidence well and produced arguments of increasing complexity. Pupils' progress is very well supported by teachers' effective use of specialist classrooms, with very impressive and stimulating displays of pupils' work to create a sense of subject identity, helpful to learning.

211. The subject is well led and managed. The new head of department has already revised the scheme of work, guiding the careful organisation and planning of lessons observed. There is recognition that GCSE results are not yet fully in line with those that pupils achieve in their other subjects, despite a significant improvement in 2001. A review of the syllabus in Years 10 and 11 is in progress.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

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

### **Strengths**

- The competence of pupils in using computers to help them with a wide variety of tasks;
- The commitment of teachers in all subjects, who plan their lessons to encourage pupils to use computers in many ways to improve the quality of their work;
- Very good management, which has very effectively developed the quantity and quality of computer resources, the breadth of the information and communication technology curriculum, and the confidence and skills of teachers in all subjects in the school.

### **Areas for improvement**

- Classroom activities and materials in lessons from Years 7 to 9 do not always support and engage the lowest attainers or help the highest attainers extend their knowledge and skills in information and communication technology as much as they could;
- Non-specialist teachers of courses in Years 10 and 11 do not always adopt best practices in giving information to pupils and are uncertain about some aspects of the subject;
- The current system of assessment does not give a detailed enough profile of each pupil's progress in different skills to focus extra help where necessary.

212. The GCSE short course in information technology has been examined for two years in the school. Results at grades A\* to C were below average in 2000, but improved significantly in 2001. Attainment of top grades improved significantly in 2001, with a high proportion of pupils attaining grade A\*. Nevertheless, pupils on average did not perform as well in information technology as in their other subjects. This year will be the last year of examination for the short GCSE course in the school as it is to be replaced by the double GNVQ Part One course in information technology.

213. In lessons and work seen, standards of attainment at age 14 are above average. Pupils are very competent users of computers to help them in a wide range of tasks, and they are familiar with computer devices and programs of many forms. Pupils use the Internet extensively for research purposes in many subjects, and organise and present documents using word processing and desktop publishing software with confidence and to good effect. They are able to organise and search for information using databases in geography. They model relationships between variables with accuracy in maths. In science and in physical education, sensors and monitors are used to measure and analyse changing light, temperature, and heart rates. In design and technology, pupils can program computers to control traffic light and barrier-raising sequences. They use spreadsheets for processing information from surveys into tables and charts, as well as completing accurate designs of

products. Pupils combine information, data and images from a range of sources to produce very effective documents. They use their computer skills to work in a variety of media in the virtual language lab to improve their reading, writing and listening skills. Their competence is therefore good across all of the main aspects of information and communication technology.

214. Attainment on entry to the school in Year 7 is below expectation. Although the level of home-computer ownership is high, pupils' experience of using computers varies widely. Nonetheless, pupils' achievement is good across Years 7 to 9. The subject is taught through other subjects in Years 8 and 9. This means that, because of limited time and the other subjects' priorities, pupils' levels of skill and understanding in information and communication technology are not pushed to very high levels by attacking more complex and challenging tasks and exploring the full capability of each piece of software they use. The pupils, therefore, do well to build such good all-round skills by the time they reach the end of Year 9.

215. By the age of 16, standards of attainment are also above average. Pupils make satisfactory progress in building on the wide experiences gained in Years 7 to 9 to complete tasks set with competence and confidence. In their GCSE course, Year 11 pupils are skilful in designing practical solutions to problems set, but their analysis and evaluations of how their solutions can be improved are not always well developed. This partly reflects their previous learning in the subject where they have used computers as tools to get specific jobs done, but they have not explored the full potential of or alternatives to the programs they have used.

216. There has been a significant improvement in the subject since the last inspection, when attainment was below expected levels because pupils were not given enough opportunities to use computers in other subjects. The subject has since been managed very well to raise standards of attainment. Improvements have been made to the quantity and quality of resources available. Better planning has raised the quality of teaching and learning about information and communication technology through all subjects in the school.

217. Teaching and learning are good. The teaching programme is now well planned across subjects in the school. Teachers in many subjects assess levels of attainment in information and communication technology as well as in their own subject in Years 7 to 9, so they have clear expectations about what pupils need to learn. Where the teaching is very good, the teacher is very clear about pupils' capability in the subject, and organises the class appropriately to extend higher attainers and to support lower attainers. The lowest attainers in a number of classes from Years 7 to 9, however, have weak keyboard skills and find some tasks too challenging. They tend to drift from the work in hand and need more appropriate activities to engage them. The organisation of the new GNVQ course for Year 10 pupils is good. Pupils are responding well to the need for individual learning using on-line materials, with good support and guidance from their teachers. The assessment, marking and monitoring of pupils' work is good across both courses in Years 10 and 11. However, non-specialist teachers' subject knowledge and confidence are not always secure on these courses in Years 10 and 11, and they do not show consistently good practice in the quality of their own presentations to pupils.

218. Most girls and boys of all ethnic backgrounds work well and apply themselves fully in lessons. Those with special educational needs usually make good progress as a result of focused support from teachers and specially appointed support assistants in class for information and communication technology.

219. Leadership and management are very good, and have been particularly effective in addressing the key issues in the subject identified at the last inspection. Governors have committed significant amounts of the school's own funds to improving resources in the

subject. Other subjects have committed themselves fully to the very effective working group established to develop the use of information and communication technology throughout the subjects of the school. The curriculum is now very broad. Procedures are in place to assess pupils' attainment in information and communication technology - as they work in other subjects. However, although it is not a national requirement to identify individual strands in assessment of information and communication technology, without this process, current procedures do not provide a detailed enough profile of each pupil's progress in the different skills within the subject so as to focus extra help where necessary. There is, however, a real momentum behind the development of information and communication in the school, and a very strong determination to use technology to make further improvements to ways in which pupils learn.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

### Strengths

- A significant rise in GCSE A\* to C grades from 2000 to 2001;
- By end of Year 9, standards are uniformly above average in all skills;
- Rapid progress and achievement in the second foreign language from Year 8;
- The quality of teaching is good, including planning of lessons, assessment and use of the foreign languages;
- Provision and use of information and communication technology promotes good learning.

### Areas for improvement

- GCSE results were below average in 2000, and pupils did less well in French and Spanish than they did in their other subjects in 2000 and 2001;
- Pupils do not have the confidence in speaking that they have in other skills in Years 10 and 11;
- Teachers' use of the foreign languages in some lessons is not as extensive and effective as it is in the large majority.

220. By the end of Year 9, pupils' achievement in French is good. They reach above average levels. Pupils' listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills develop well, in a reasonably uniform way. Accuracy develops well alongside pupils' ability to communicate. Girls and boys do equally well. Pupils with special educational needs do as well as their classmates because they receive good support, helping them to play a full part in lessons. All pupils reach levels above those expected nationally, and most reach the higher levels. In their second foreign language, Spanish, pupils make rapid progress in a short time, above a reasonable expectation.

221. By the end of Year 11, pupils' achievement in both languages is satisfactory. They develop their understanding of what they hear and read well, but they often demonstrate limited confidence in using the languages actively. Speaking, in particular, is less developed than the other skills. The proportion of pupils reaching GCSE grades A\* to C in French and Spanish has fluctuated in recent years and pupils, overall, have not attained as highly as they have in their other subjects. Results were above average in 1999, but below in 2000 in both languages. Results in 2001 show a distinct improvement on 2000.

222. Since the last inspection, standards at the end of Year 9 have risen, but those at the end of Year 11 have often been below the standards that pupils have attained in their other subjects. The faculty has been through a period of staffing turbulence and was for a time effectively without a leader. This has had an unsettling effect on pupils' learning, which is apparent in their achievement in Years 10 and 11. Over the past two years, with the appointment of a new head of faculty and the establishment of stability in the teaching team, much has been done to improve the situation. Pupils' achievement by Year 9 and the rising GCSE results bear testimony to the hard work by all concerned. This bodes well for the future. Curriculum time remains well below average for classes taking two languages in Year 9. Good teaching and learning ensure that the adverse effects of this are mitigated so that pupils achieve well.

223. Teaching is good overall in all years and some lessons are extremely well taught. Teachers are all well qualified linguists, and several are native speakers. The quality of language they use is in consequence high, so pupils learn the right things and develop good accents and intonation. Teachers plan stimulating activities that enable pupils to use all four linguistic skills (speaking, listening, reading and writing) realistically in combination, and these skills develop uniformly as a result. Writing is frequently supported by relevant homework so that lesson time may be better used for the interactive skills. Teachers keep a close eye on the progress of individuals, tailoring work effectively to their needs so that everyone achieves as well as possible. Praise and feedback are common features of lessons, so pupils know how they are doing and how to improve. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are usually very good in consequence. Teachers have worked hard to address the imbalances in pupils' learning apparent in Years 10 and 11. In a small minority of lessons, they are over-cautious and use English excessively, with the result that pupils do not use the foreign languages to the extent that they could, and the pace of the lessons is made unduly slow. In the large majority of lessons the reverse is true.

224. Leadership is very good and has promoted a rapid rise in GCSE results. Analyses of results and progress have helped give a focus to raising boys' achievement, so that in Year 10, for example, there is an equal number of boys and girls in the top sets. The introduction of the Virtual Language Laboratory has motivated pupils, helping them to develop their skills at a pace which suits them, and giving them access to a wide range of authentic material to support their studies well.

## MUSIC

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

### Strengths

- Very good teaching and learning;
- An enriching programme of extra-curricular activities.

### Areas for improvement

- More lesson-time for music in Year 9.

225. By the end of Year 9, pupils' achievement in relation to their standards of attainment on entry to the school at age 11 is good. Most pupils attain above average standards in performing, composing and listening. Pupils have clear understanding of the notion of the beat and its connection to rhythm, and make good use of ideas for composing, for example blues music. Pupils know and understand a reasonable range of notes from notation and

are able to locate and perform them on keyboards. They sing expressively. They listen to music well and make good judgements about what they hear, such as Barber's "Adagio". They use appropriate musical vocabulary when they speak about the music, and are familiar, for example with tempo, texture, timbre and dynamics. They interpret the feeling of the music sensitively. They have adequate knowledge and understanding of composers and styles.

226. By the end of Year 11, standards in the relatively small GCSE groups are above average, representing good progress from the previous stage. Composition includes improvisation, and pupils show good awareness of underlying harmonies. They invent good melodies and show an increasing ability to concentrate and meet the requirements of the work that they undertake. Performing skills vary widely, between a pianist who has achieved Grade 8 in piano examinations, and those who have keyboard skills acquired only in school music lessons. All participate strongly and confidently at their own level, to a good standard. Pupils demonstrate good knowledge and understanding of an appropriate range of composers and styles. Numbers of candidates in recent GCSE examinations have been too small for valid comparisons with national averages, but a good proportion of pupils have obtained GCSE grades in the A\* to C range, and all pupils entered obtained a graded result.

227. Over ninety pupils enhance their musical attainment and achievement by studying a musical instrument. Further opportunities occur through participation in the orchestra, singing groups and musical productions, currently "Grease".

228. In the last inspection, while finding music in most respects to be satisfactory, there was some concern about compositional skills and the lack of an A level course. Time for lessons was inadequate and there was no provision for information and communication technology ICT. These concerns have largely been remedied very well, but time for lessons in Year 9 remains less than for Years 7 and 8, and continues, therefore, to be an obstacle to raising standards further.

229. The quality of teaching is never less than good and is mostly very good. Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the subject and very good performance skills. They present the subject in a good humoured, persuasive and buoyant manner, which elicits good, confident responses from the pupils. Lessons have pace and make good use of resources including those for ICT. Pupils' work is carefully assessed according to criteria that they understand. Pupils know how they are doing and what to do to improve. Targets for classwork and homework are set and these, together with good assessment procedures, provide a powerful strategy for improving standards. The very good teaching that they receive enables pupils to achieve well. For example, Year 8 pupils make very good progress in acquiring knowledge and understanding of chords and triads: Year 10 make very good progress learning chord sequences. Pupils of all levels of competence make very good progress. Very good teaching ensures that all pupils are fully included in lessons. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, as do all from minority-ethnic groups. Talented pupils achieve well. Pupils with physical handicaps make very good progress, both in lessons and in extra-curricular groups.

230. The management of the department has recently changed, but it is clear from results and documentation that it has been good in the past. Evidence from the inspection indicates that it is equally good now in ensuring a very good quality of teaching and learning.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- The quality of teaching is very good;
- The leadership and management of the subject are very good;
- Monitoring and assessment of pupils' performance are very effective;
- Specialist accommodation is of very good quality;
- Pupils are well motivated and have very positive attitudes to the subject.

### Areas for improvement

- Monitoring of teaching;
- GCSE examination standards.

231. Pupils of all ages are encouraged to learn successfully by the high quality teaching that they receive. Many pupils extend their knowledge, understanding and skills to the highest possible levels. Many compete successfully at district and regional level. Standards overall are improving, as demonstrated by comprehensive end-of-module assessments and teachers' assessments of pupils' progress at the end of Year 9 and at GCSE. Current evidence strongly suggests that this trend will continue.

232. Pupils achieve well by the end of Year 9. Competencies on entry to the school are at the nationally expected level. By the end of Year 9, detailed teacher assessments show that the attainment of pupils exceeds the national expectation in all areas of the subject curriculum. Observations of lessons support this view. Pupils are able to perform skilfully in a range of games and aesthetic activities. They have a good understanding of health-related fitness, and know how and why to warm up before exercise. They understand the effects of physical exercise on the heart, and can take accurate pulse-readings. Pupils with special educational needs make similar progress to others. There are no discernible differences between boys' and girls' achievements or between the different ethnic groups at any age. All students make good progress.

233. By the end of Year 11, standards continue to be above the national average, as pupils build on the strong foundations of earlier years. Pupils achieve well in lessons, and progress and learning in a wide range of activities are always at least good. The very large majority of pupils, from all groups, effectively apply their specific knowledge of different activities, their performance skills and their understanding of rules and tactics in full-game situations. As tactical awareness develops alongside technical skills, pupils are able to make effective decisions in offensive and defensive situations in games, and can accurately officiate, applying the rules well in games. All pupils participate fully in a programme of health-related fitness.

234. The department has responded positively to findings of the last inspection. Strong aspects have been maintained and extended. Areas noted for improvement have been addressed. In consequence, the subject has improved significantly since the last inspection. The quality of teaching has improved, especially where teachers have shown the confidence to adjust their planning to meet specific and immediate needs. The range of timetabled provision and the breadth of extra-curricular activities provide many opportunities for both elite performers and interest groups to refine and develop their knowledge, skills and understanding. A fully open-access GCSE course is now available, and is supported by strong quality-assurance arrangements.



235. The quality of teaching at all ages is very good. All teachers have secure knowledge and are enthusiastic in their delivery. Detailed planning of lessons is used to support well laid out and comprehensive schemes of work. Teachers work hard to raise standards of literacy, and there is extensive and innovative use of ICT as a tool for learning. Management of classes is never less than good, giving all pupils the opportunity to engage successfully in lessons. The use of shared learning objectives, allied to very searching questions to probe pupils' understanding and knowledge, ensures consistency and progression. Teachers challenge pupils to work hard and produce outcomes of high quality. They have consistently high expectations that pupils will succeed. This was very apparent in a Year 10 lesson, where pupils were using weights and aerobic equipment to develop a personal training programme. The facility was used safely, with very good mental and physical effort, by both girls and boys, and with a growing understanding of the benefits being gained. Teachers have generated a strong sense of purpose in learning, based on challenge, support and trust.

236. Pupils respond well to the exciting environment created by purposeful and stimulating teaching. They dress suitably for the subject. They pay close attention to teachers' guidance, and work with energy and enthusiasm. They are able and willing to offer cogent responses to searching questions. In consequence, relationships and behaviour are very good, and contribute strongly to good overall progress in lessons.

237. The department is very effectively led and managed. The head of faculty and his colleagues have a clear vision of the standards to be achieved and understand how to reach these standards. The detailed end-of-module assessment and reporting arrangements provide accurate information on pupils' performance. Pupils know how well they are progressing, and teachers are provided with objective data on the intended outcomes of learning. This links closely with the ongoing programme of staff and curriculum development, and is helping to secure high standards. Careful staff deployment ensures even coverage across all areas of the curriculum. Relationships within the young and energetic staff are excellent, and they make a well-balanced team. They support each other well, and work with commitment to the pupils and to the subject. They are consistent in their challenge and support, and contribute significantly to the ethos, work and life of the school. There is a clear imperative to improve on what has been the previous best standard.

238. Accommodation and resources are comprehensive. There are very extensive outdoor areas, though drainage presents a significant problem in bad weather. Indoor facilities are generous and well cared for, and changing areas are adequate. The quality and amount of equipment for use in lessons is very good. The department has access to the Tirabad outdoor education centre. Specialist staff are given time to work very constructively with partner primary schools. The school has made a very detailed application to become a specialist sports college, and currently holds the Sportsmark award.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Teaching is never less than good, sometimes very good and occasionally excellent;
- Teachers manage pupils very well;
- The department is very well led and managed;
- The curriculum for Years 7, 8 and 9 is very good.
- Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and at GCSE;
- Contribution towards the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils is very good.

### Areas for improvement

- Statutory requirements for the provision of religious education in Years 10 and 11 (and in the sixth form) are not met.
- The use of assessment-data to inform the planning of new work;
- The setting of detailed targets against which progress can be identified and shared with pupils;
- The assessment of attitudes, values and the spiritual dimension;

239. Attainment in Years 7 to 9 is in line with expectations of the locally agreed syllabus. For most pupils in Years 10 and 11, attainment is well below expectations, owing to unsatisfactory provision. Pupils who take the GCSE course attain above average standards.

240. In lessons and work seen during the inspection, pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is good and consistent with expected levels in the agreed syllabus. Good examples were seen of pupils developing their knowledge and understanding of religious language, principles and concepts. Multi-faith and multi-cultural issues, rites of passage and ordination are successfully handled. Pupils generally make sense of what they study and relate it to their experiences of life. In Year 7, they develop good attitudes towards different religious groups and demonstrate extensive knowledge of issues arising from different faiths. In Year 8, pupils show good understanding of the views of the major Christian churches about the ordination of women. In a Year 9 lesson, they understood the Hindu belief that life is a cycle, and their understanding of terms, such as 're-incarnation' and 'caste', show a good level of achievement over the key stage. Pupils proffer useful links between the subject and their everyday experiences. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress, as do all ethnic and faith groups. Good discussions, with correct use of key words and technical language, help to improve literacy and oral competence.

241. In lessons and work seen in Years 10 and 11, pupils' attainment falls short of the expectations of the agreed syllabus because of the poor provision of time for the subject. The curriculum that pupils receive is inadequate to fulfil statutory requirements, and most pupils' subject experience is not developed to the extent that it should be. However, Year 10 pupils who take the GCSE course achieve well. Their attainment is in line with national expectations and, in some cases, exceeds it. They have a very good understanding of issues such as sexism, prejudice and discrimination and are able to relate these to a Christian perspective. They are successful at linking Christian principles with life experiences, and can make judgements and develop attitudes in an analytical way. In Year 11, pupils' attainment on the GCSE course is significantly below average, but their achievement is satisfactory. For example, pupils understood through a good practical exercise the importance of the Buddhist use of meditation to achieve enlightenment.

242. There are no significant differences in the standards achieved by pupils of different gender or ethnic background. Pupils with special educational needs, those with English as an additional language and those who are gifted or talented make good progress.

243. Since the last inspection, attainment in Years 7 to 9 has improved. Good improvement has been made in the schemes of work and consequently in planning. The assessment procedures have improved, although the use of assessment to inform curricular planning and the provision of targets for pupils requires further development. There has been a significant improvement in the contribution that religious education now makes to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. Overall, the improvements since the last inspection have had a good impact on standards, pupil achievement and progress. However, inadequate improvement has been made in meeting the statutory requirements for the subject for most pupils in Years 10 and 11, and they continue to be denied their curricular entitlement.

244. Teaching is never less than good, often very good and occasionally excellent. The teaching overall is of high quality, which has a significant impact on pupils' achievement. Planning is very good, and this helps pupils to focus on information learnt in previous lessons. Aims in lessons are shared with pupils in all cases, helping them to understand what is to be achieved. Teachers make good use of questioning to consolidate current learning and to review previous work. They use a suitable range of styles that enable pupils to learn from the tenets of the religions that they study within the subject as a whole. This assists pupils to maintain interest and develop understanding of religious principles and concepts. Resources are well used, especially worksheets. These enable pupils with different needs to learn well. Teachers manage pupils very well, contributing to a good climate for learning in the classroom. Extension work and homework are used to good effect in allowing pupils to reflect on the information that they have gained in class. Teachers have clear expectations of pupils and challenge them to succeed so that they achieve well.

245. Assessment of pupils' work is generally satisfactory and helpful comments are made in exercise books. The procedures provide a sound basis for assessing what pupils know and understand. However, assessment does not sufficiently inform the curriculum and the planning of new work. Teachers do not set detailed targets against which they can assess pupils' progress. Consequently, pupils are unclear about the standards they are reaching and what they need to do to improve. The department recognises this as an area for development.

246. Overall, pupils learn successfully. Their attitudes to learning are very good. They behave very well, are generally well motivated and apply themselves to the work. They work very well together at a productive pace. The relationship between teachers and pupils is good, and teachers support individuals both academically and personally. Pupils' very good behaviour makes a very good contribution to their achievement and progress.

247. The subject makes a valuable contribution to the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils. It provides good opportunities for pupils to explore world issues of justice, relationships and personal beliefs. In lessons, teaching encourages pupils to explore their personal views about religious and moral issues. Work on the major world religions prompts discussion about the cultures that support them, preparing pupils well for life in a multi-faith and multi-cultural society. In Years 10 and 11, there are three topics taught within the programme of personal and social education. Although the planning and delivery of these topics is good, the curriculum is wholly inadequate to fulfil the requirements of the locally agreed syllabus for religious education. As a consequence, the curriculum as a whole is inadequate. As statutory requirements are not met for most pupils in Years 10 and 11, they do not receive their full entitlement to religious education. This was also the case at the last inspection.

248. The department is led and managed very well with a clear sense of purpose and direction. The head of the department approaches the task with enthusiasm and commitment. There is excellent support from other departmental staff. However, the school's leadership is not yet providing all pupils with their entitlement to this subject.

## VOCATIONAL COURSES

### BUSINESS EDUCATION

Overall, the quality of provision in business education in Years 10 and 11 is **satisfactory**.

#### Strengths

- Popularity of the subject and its contribution to the curriculum for Years 10 and 11;
- Improvement in GCSE results, especially in 2001;
- Support for students;
- A well-led team of teachers.

#### Areas for improvement

- To develop further more appropriate schemes of work;
- To clarify learning objectives within individual lessons;
- Support, example and leadership given to all members of the faculty;
- Further develop links with the local business community.

249. Business Studies is a popular choice for students in Years 10 and 11, with almost half the year group taking this optional subject. GCSE results in 2000 were average in the percentage of pupils attaining A\* to C grades. Results improved significantly in 2001, showing a return to the standards attained in 1998 and 1999.

250. Since the last inspection, the previous head of department has left the school and there was some delay in appointing a permanent replacement. Other staffing changes have occurred which have slowed down the process of review and refinement of teaching materials to meet changed examination specifications. The newly appointed head of faculty is doing well to review, revise and update schemes of work to meet the requirements of new examination specifications. She offers good leadership to a team of teachers who are being encouraged to exchange and develop new teaching methods. The results of these changes are already reflected in improved learning in Year 10.

251. Overall, teaching is satisfactory for this GCSE course, though teaching in Year 11 lacks challenge and interest for some students. The use of coursework tasks seen during the inspection, for example on marketing snacks in school, did not provide students with a sense of the immediacy and relevance of the subject. However, it is recognised that students have previously attained high scores in examinations from use of these tasks. Learning objectives in individual lessons are not always clear and are not made explicit to students. Teaching in Year 10, however, is more lively and challenging, leading to more positive and enthusiastic responses from students. Good use is made of students' prior knowledge. They are encouraged to develop evaluative skills by close questioning, for example to establish understanding of the relative importance of the different components of Maslow's "hierarchy of needs". Teachers provide excellent support to their students. Marking of work is helpful and supportive, and students are able to see what they need to do in order to raise their achievements. Students in lower-attaining classes are given appropriate encouragement and helped to understand complex topics, such as motivation,

by reference to their own behaviour. Girls and boys, including those with special educational needs achieve satisfactory standards in the subject, along with other pupils. Those with minority-ethnic backgrounds achieve in line with other pupils and gain confidence from the excellent role models of teachers from similar ethnic backgrounds.

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

In the inspection, 13 subjects and courses were inspected and are reported on in detail. Work in other subjects and courses was sampled and contributed to the overall picture of teaching and learning in the school.

The following tables show entry and performance information for courses completed in 2000, the latest year for which national comparisons are available.

**GCE AS level courses (2000)**

Subject	Number entered	% Gaining grades A-E		% Gaining grades A-B		Average points score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	5	60	63	40	17	2	1.6
Chemistry	1	0	47	0	6	0	0.9
Physics	3	100	53	0	8	1.3	1.1
Spanish	2	50	73	0	17	0.5	1.8

**GCE A Level and GNVQ advanced courses (2000)**

Subject	Number entered	% Gaining grades A-E		% Gaining grades A-B		Average points score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	33	97	89	52	45	6.5	6.0
Biology	13	100	88	15	34	5.7	5.3
Chemistry	9	100	89	44	42	6.2	5.9
Physics	19	100	88	58	41	7.3	5.7
Other sciences	1	100	89	100	31	10	5.19
Full design & technology	3	100	92	100	29	8	5.4
Home economics	8	88	81	8	81	3.8	4.6
Business GNVQ	24	na	na	Na	na	13.3	10.8
Economics	17	94	88	47	36	6.2	5.4
Sports studies/ physical education	7	86	91	14	25	4.6	4.9
Art & design	9	100	96	44	45	6.9	6.4
Music	5	100	93	20	35	6	5.7
Geography	21	95	92	43	37	6.6	5.4
History	18	100	89	56	34	7.2	5.4
Other social studies	24	96	88	42	35	6.17	5.43
Sociology	10	100	88	60	37	7.4	5.46

Religious studies	7	86	91	43	35	5. 7	5. 6
English Literature	38	100	96	45	36	6. 7	5. 9
French	6	100	91	67	39	7. 3	5. 4
Other languages	1	100	94	0	59	6	7. 1
Spanish	3	100	90	33	40	5. 3	5. 8

### ***Intermediate vocational qualifications***

Subject	Number entered	% Gaining grades A-E		% Gaining grades A-B		% Achieving qualifications	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	6	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	100	73. 2
Leisure and tourism	5	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		

## **SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS**

### **MATHEMATICS**

252. The focus was on pure mathematics, mechanics, statistics and further mathematics. Students benefit from a wide range of possible combination of modules. Students usually do well at A level, considering their GCSE results, as in 2000. The quality of provision in the sixth form continues to improve. Students' work in the subject successfully assists their progress in their other mathematically related courses.

#### **Mathematics**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Results are well above national averages;
- The standard of work that students produce is above average and they are achieving well;
- Teaching is good and consequently students are highly motivated and work hard;
- The department is well managed and teachers work well as a team.

#### **Areas for development**

- None.

253. The inspection covered the range of modular options offered by the school: pure mathematics, mechanics, statistics and further mathematics.

254. The mathematics department does well for its sixth form students. They have gained results consistently higher than the national average, with a gradually rising trend. Notable features have been the high pass rate and high proportion of A and B grades. This represents very good achievement, given students' GCSE standards when they start the

course. The take up of mathematics is lower by female than male students, but their results are similar. The department has very good teachers who provide positive role models for prospective female students, more of whom are beginning to take the subject.

255. The standard of work seen in lessons and in students' folders confirms the well above average standards attained in examinations. The quality of students' oral and especially their written work is well above average and the high standards at the last inspection have been maintained. Male and female students do equally well. Students value the extra support that is available in the weekly 'clinics' after school. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course, but they are achieving well, and successfully moving on from their GCSE work into new areas. Students in Year 13 are benefiting from successes already achieved in their different modules, and are responding well to the demands of the more advanced work, as in further mathematics. The department makes very good provision for students who were not successful in achieving a C grade pass at GCSE to take the examination again in the sixth form. Many do so, and most are eventually successful.

256. Teaching is good. Of the six lessons seen, one was very good while another was excellent. Students learn well in each of the modules because the teaching is good. They benefit from the expertise of two different teachers for each of their modules. Teaching is improving as teachers become more confident with the new demands of the modular course structure. The flexibility of the new course also benefits students, and all achieve some success whether it is an AS level or A levels.

257. Lessons always have clear objectives. Teachers structure lessons well, keep up a fast pace and provide high levels of challenge. Consequently, students work hard and are highly motivated. In one lesson on linear programming, the teacher's methods were entirely suited to purpose because she simply sat with the students working through the questions with them, experiencing the same problems they were, encouraging and sharing her ways of working with them. In another lesson where the students had a wide range of prior attainment, a different teacher was very careful to ensure that all students understood the topic, providing a very comprehensive and clear set of his notes for them to use. They work co-operatively in pairs and small groups and contribute in discussions involving the whole class. Marking of students' work contains enough detail to help students to see how they can improve. The department makes good use of target setting and review with its students.

258. The mathematics department is well managed. The teachers are enthusiastic, committed to improvement and work well together. Students are justified in their confidence that they will be taught well.

## **SCIENCES**

259. The focus was on physics and biology, but chemistry was also sampled. Examination results in A level chemistry were above average in 2000 and students achieved at least what could reasonably have been expected, considering their GCSE results. During the inspection, two chemistry lessons were observed; both were very good, and both teachers showed very good subject expertise. The Year 12 lesson was characterised by great pace and challenge, and students made very good progress in learning about links between structure, bonding, and the physical characteristics of materials. In the Year 13 lesson, students made very good gains in their knowledge of the typical reactions of the carbonyl group, in particular those of aldehydes. Students achieved well because of very good teaching of the mechanisms of organic chemistry reactions, and the teacher's very high expectation of students' understanding of these.



## Physics

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

### Strengths

- Very good examination results;
- Teaching is very good; teachers have very good expertise, high expectations and explain topics very well;
- Computers are used very well in lessons;
- The head of department monitors and evaluates the subject performance very well, making very good use of statistical data;
- Resources are good and used very well by teachers and students.

### Areas for improvement

- Teachers' marking does not follow a consistent policy;
- Students' independent learning skills are not fully developed; they rely heavily on their teachers to guide them;
- There are few links with business and industry;
- Continue to encourage girls to study physics.

260. Modular physics A level results in the summer of 2000 were above the national average. Achievement was very good, because considerable value was added to students' attainment, compared with their standard at GCSE. Both the percentage pass rate and the percentage obtaining A and B grades were well above those attained nationally. All students were male. In the 2001 examinations, for which no national comparisons have yet been made, the school's own analysis shows that students performed better than average in the new AS modular physics course and, at A level, kept up the high standard of previous years. A small number of students discontinued the subject after their AS examinations to concentrate on other courses, but the subject is popular, and those following it comprise two teaching groups in each of Years 12 and 13. The current Year 12 group contains a relatively high number of girls.

261. The work of current students indicates that high standards are being maintained. Year 13 are achieving well and at least meeting the targets set for them on the basis of their GCSE results. In one very good lesson, the teacher constantly challenged pupils with probing questions. For example, they learned the theory of how to measure the quantity of electric charge stored in a capacitor, and most could explain how this could be done in practice. In another lesson, where the teacher made good use of data-logging software, students gained a good knowledge of the damping of oscillations and were able to understand some ways in which this is made use of in everyday life, for example in the suspension systems in cars. Most students contributed well to discussions about this.

262. Year 12 students understood the use of potential dividers to control automatic switching in electric circuits in response to light or heat. Again, their teacher made good use of questioning to enable them to understand the key concept about changes in resistance in the circuits. In both Year 12 lessons, girls were achieving much better than boys at this stage in the course. For example, girls managed a very open-ended investigation on projectiles to devise more accurate ways of carrying out the practical experiment, realising the limits of the equipment provided better than boys. Girls went much further in the potential divider investigation than most boys.

263. The quality of teaching is very good overall. Evidence from the five lessons seen, from work in students' folders, and from their examination results indicates very good progress as a result of the quality of teaching. The main strengths are teachers' very good skills and expert command of the subject, which enables them to explain difficult concepts in simple terms. They help students to understand without reducing the rigour of thinking required. This, in turn, helps students to apply their new knowledge quickly to different situations. They are supported by teachers' constant reminders of where they have met similar concepts, such as exponential decay curves, so that they understand the subject as a whole, rather than as a set of unrelated ideas. Teachers have very high expectations of their pupils. They know their strengths and limitations well, through frequent assessment. They plan very well to extend those capable of A grades, as well as ensuring that those who are less competent achieve the main lesson objectives in order to move on. In a lesson on simple harmonic motion, for example, three different levels of achievement were expected in terms of energy changes, graphical representation and real life uses.

264. Teachers extend students' work in lessons by giving them problems and calculations to do in their own time. Most students' files showed good evidence of the work they had done independently. There were some inconsistencies seen in the quality of marking, however. Each teaching group has two teachers. Some write detailed notes with structured guidance; others just tick while others expect students to mark their own work using textbooks. Nevertheless, students thought that their work was carefully and rigorously marked, well enough to provide them with very good guidance on how to improve. They valued teachers' efforts.

265. All teachers show great understanding of the different levels of mathematical competence among their students. They take great care to support and reassure those not doing mathematics at A level, when tackling concepts such as integration, for example. As a result, students themselves feel confident and consider that lack of mathematics does not present a problem in their understanding of physics.

266. Computers are used very well in lessons, in data logging, as for the potential divider investigation, and in simulations, for example simple harmonic motion and capacitance. However, it is not obviously used by students in their own research projects; only one example was seen in their work samples, on radioactivity.

267. Students work well together in practical sessions and in discussion on theoretical matters. The teaching groups are of suitable size to enable productive discussion to take place, particularly among older students with greater knowledge and experience. All defer very much to their teachers in class, however, and find it difficult to present ideas based on their own reading or research. They usually wait for teachers to ask questions that promote deeper thinking. The AS and A level courses are very demanding, and there is little free time to enrich the curriculum by making business and industrial links, although students have enthusiastically taken part in Living Physics studies at the Tirabad centre.

268. Leadership of the subject is very good. A new head of department has recently been appointed, but is already carrying on the very good work of her predecessor. There has been a change in syllabus to coincide with the new AS courses started last year. These courses have been rigorously planned, monitored and evaluated throughout their introduction and students have been taught to a very high level. The results achieved have been rigorously analysed, and points for further improvement noted. All teachers have been monitored formally in the classroom, and the constant discussion between the teachers who teach A level physics ensures that informal monitoring goes on constantly. Resources available to teachers are good and used very well. The department has improved since the last inspection and is very well placed to improve further.

## BIOLOGY

The quality of provision in biology is **good**.

### Strengths

- A level results are regularly above average, including at the A and B grades;
- Students make good progress and achieve slightly higher standards than are predicted from their GCSE grades;
- Teaching is good; teachers use their own very extensive specialist knowledge fluently and effectively to promote good learning;
- Teaching and learning are particularly effective when students have researched topics in private study time in anticipation of discussion in class;
- The curriculum is well planned to provide a very good balance of opportunities to develop knowledge, understanding and practical skills.

### Areas for improvement

- Assessment procedures in biology are not sufficiently developed and co-ordinated. Students do not have enough scheduled opportunities for regular individual discussion with biology teachers about their progress;
- There is too much reliance on informal, rather than more formal, organisation, coordination and communication, in managing the subject;
- Many students are not making the most of their private study time to ensure that their progress is even better.

269. Achievement is good. Students mainly achieve as well, and sometimes higher, than their GCSE results indicate. A level results in 2000 were above average, and there was a marked improvement in the proportion of students gaining A and B grades. Both boys and girls attained above the national average. Girls' results compared particularly well with those in their other subjects. A few students with GCSE science results below grade B found the course difficult and were, as predicted, unsuccessful in the examination. Nine of the 24 students who entered the AS examination last summer achieved grades A and B. Five students, as expected, did not attain a pass grade. Twelve students are continuing biology in Year 13, while the rest chose other subjects in line with their plans for higher education.

270. The standard of work seen during the inspection in Years 12 and 13 is average, and students are likely to attain across the full range of grades in both year groups. As in 2000, it is predicted that a small number of students who joined the course with modest GCSE grades in double award science and who are not studying chemistry may well encounter difficulties with the course.

271. Opportunities for students to discuss topics and make presentations to the rest of the class are particularly effective in promoting learning. For example, during group discussions and presentations, students in Year 13 drew successfully on their studies on the preservation and storage of fresh fruit and vegetables in the food industry. In work on respiration, students constructed flow charts and used these to explain the cellular processes of glycolysis and the Krebs's Cycle. This is challenging for students who are not studying chemistry at A level, but they are very committed to their work. Students most value the opportunity to talk about their work because this helps them to identify what they know well and gaps in their understanding. However, students do not have enough planned

opportunities for regular individual discussion with their teachers about their progress and what they can do to improve. Students in Year 12 are only a few weeks into their course, but are beginning to build successfully on their GCSE work. However, those with modest grades in GCSE mathematics have difficulty in calculating the magnification of cells, for example.

272. Teaching is good overall and occasionally it is very good. Of the six lessons seen, two were especially successful because the methods challenged students to do their own research and then test their level of understanding by making presentations of their findings to the rest of their class. Actively involving students in this way is a very effective teaching method. Students were required to draw on their prior learning, discuss in groups, formulate their ideas, and then explain to the class, why, for example, fruit at different stages of ripeness should not be stored together. Where combined storage was necessary, students could explain what measures should be taken to control the process. Teachers have very good subject knowledge, and this provides a richness and depth to their work. The curriculum is very well planned to meet the requirements of Year 12 and Year 13 courses, giving students a very good balance of theory and practical work. Marking of practical work is very thorough and students receive very good guidance on how to improve their practical skills. Nevertheless, the quality of other marking is of too variable a quality because teachers are using different grading schemes. They are inconsistent in the amount of written guidance they give to help students improve the standard of their work.

273. Students in Year 13 learn well in lessons. They work productively and respond positively to the different styles of learning that are required. They listen attentively to each other's presentations, and they are mature and mutually supportive. The quality of learning in Year 12 and students' response to the teaching is more variable, but it is good overall. In lessons, Year 12 students are not yet as confident as Year 13 in offering ideas in discussion. Students generally are not making the most of their private study time to consolidate and develop their knowledge and understanding of the subject. By Year 13, their study skills have improved, though some still struggle to develop the necessary self-discipline. Year 12 students can prepare well for lessons, but they do not yet do so consistently. From private study, they successfully deepen their understanding of the biochemistry and properties of proteins prior to making presentations to the class. However, inadequate preparation, coupled with poor independent study skills during the lesson, resulted in slower than expected progress on the microscopic structure of cells.

274. Leadership and management of the subject are satisfactory. The teaching-team is highly committed to the work, and there is much informal and very valuable sharing of ideas. However, formal procedures for leading and managing the department are insufficient, for example in the areas of curricular development and financial planning. Insufficient time has been allocated to the co-ordination of assessment and to the development of a programme of support and guidance for individual students.

## **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING**

275. The focus was on design and technology (resistant materials), but A level and AS food technology results were analysed and work sampled. A level product design with textiles technology was also sampled. In 2000, A level food technology results were below average, but improved in 2001, when nine of ten candidates passed the examination. 2001 AS examination results in food technology were below predicted grades, as a result of the teething troubles of the new examination. One candidate did not attain a pass grade, four candidates attained grades D and E. There are no recent results for the product design with

textiles course. A very good Year 12 lesson in textiles was seen in which students explored challenging and imaginative designs. Another Y12 lesson involved students using computers well to complete some very exciting investigations into popular cultures and fashions, despite the absence through injury of their specialist teacher.

### **Design and technology (resistant materials)**

Provision for design and technology is **very good** but hampered by the design of the accommodation.

#### **Strengths**

- The quality of teaching and specialist knowledge of staff;
- Students often work well in small groups to share ideas and develop opinions;
- Results show an improvement over time;
- The quality of computer resources has improved and supports presentation of work well;
- Students' thinking skills are developed very well and students explore areas of personal and community interest in their final product.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- Accommodation restricts group work, practical work and independent learning;
- Accommodation and facilities for designing are below modern standards;
- Review and consolidation of designing and making skills on entry to the course, to let the standard for AS level work.

276. A level results in 2000 were high. The three students who took the examination gained A or B grades. In 2001, all six students passed and half of them, a high proportion, attained grades A or B. Rigorous analysis has identified both academic and personal issues that influenced results resulting in plans in place to remedy problems. The course generally attracts male students but the percentage of female students has now improved at AS level. In AS results in 2001, most students passed and a third attained A or B grades. Students were well prepared to continue to A level.

277. Students achieve well and know what they must do to improve. The introduction of AS level has been successful. It has enabled students to recognise what they need to learn more precisely, using their AS experience successfully as a foundation for A level. Students pursue A level in Year 12 and 13, with a minority changing the material they choose to work with, for example, from home economics to graphics. In one AS lesson seen, students used a challenging 'spoof' design of a ferret lead to establish the importance of prior knowledge and lateral thinking, when designing to meet a specific need. The resulting humour and group discussion were good, highlighting the complexities and importance of good research. However, some students are not yet thinking widely enough in free, developmental sketching, which is fundamental to effective product design. Accommodation and difficult working conditions are unhelpful to designing. The equipment available and the space in the workshop-studio further restrict the quality of work possible.

278. Although Year 13 students are at an early stage in their A level course, standards of work of current students are above national expectations. They combine new skills with learning from GCSE and AS courses to develop their knowledge and build their confidence

as designers. Their enthusiastic questioning indicates a good level of interest and understanding. At A level, designing takes on new and exciting challenges and progress is very good. In Year 13, complicated principles of gears and braking-systems were clarified by observation of a Norton motorcycle, to put the learning in context.

279. Students' attitudes to the subject are very good. They develop deeper thinking to reflect sustainable development and knowledge of finite resources, along with meeting the challenge of innovative design for more individual needs. Two students are developing a clock to help Alzheimer's disease sufferers to gain a better concept of time. These students showed excellent commitment, for example by attending a course about the disease so as to develop their initial ideas. Students' designing skills are good, but note-taking skills are less secure. Valuable information and worksheets provide students with a written record to help to support their learning. However, weak techniques in note-taking reduce the volume and quality of students' written records, which in the longer term are unhelpful when they revise for examinations.

280. Teaching is very good. The emphasis on thinking strategies at AS level is having a positive impact on learning. Teaching is generally well planned, with stimulating use of practical opportunities, such as the use of well chosen practical examples, artefacts to illustrate teaching points and the overhead projector to consolidate learning. In Year 12, teaching fosters enquiry skills. Students show a mature understanding and can distinguish between human wants and needs. In all lessons observed, excellent relationships and stimulating teaching contribute strongly to learning. Students develop into enthusiastic designers who readily engage in productive group and pair-work, helping each other to solve problems and develop solutions. However, students become frustrated with the cramped working conditions and the lack of access to drawing boards, which constrains the quality and accuracy of their design drawing and prevents them from full use of artefacts available.

281. Students do not consistently meet deadlines for completion of homework. Nevertheless, teachers' methods to track progress and a published set of deadlines for completion of work are improving the completion of work. Teachers encourage students to persevere with a problem. As a result, students are creative, concentrate on their problem solving and can articulate the strengths and weaknesses of their design. They have a clear realisation that recording their failed ideas, as well as their successes, demonstrates their thinking processes. Questioning is used well to establish understanding. Less use is made of individual students' presentation of their designs to the group, to enable all to develop a critical eye for their own designs and the work of commercial designers.

282. The leadership and management of the subject are very good. High expectations are set which accelerate learning. The department produces a clear analysis of examination results. This ensures that ideas for improvement are specifically focused on raising achievement. Monitoring of the work of the department is thorough. The main weakness is the quality of accommodation.

## **BUSINESS**

283. The focus was on the AVCE business and A and AS economics courses, but intermediate GNVQ business was also sampled. A small group of four students are taking the GNVQ intermediate course in business. Results from earlier years have been above average. In 2001, six out of a group of ten students gained merits. In lessons seen, the small number of students taking the course enabled high levels of purposeful support and guidance by teachers, but restricted the range of activities that could be undertaken.

## Business Education

Overall the quality of provision is **good**.

### Strengths

- Excellent results in 2000 under the former specification for the subject;
- Popularity of the subject and its contribution to the range of the curriculum;
- Support provided for students;
- Teamwork by teachers.

### Areas for improvement

- To maintain pace and challenge in all classes;
- To improve the design of assignments;
- To extend students' experiences of the business world.

284. In 2001, advanced GNVQ results in business well exceeded national averages, with 11 students from a group of 20 gaining distinctions. Only one student failed to complete the course. These results represent very good achievement for the students concerned, and an improvement on those of the previous two years, which were also better than national averages. Boys and girls attain well in the subject.

285. Standards of attainment among students currently in Years 12 and 13 are above expectation. This represents good achievement for students of average attainment on entry. Initial results from students taking AVCE in business are good. Students taking the single and double award are expected in the main to achieve grades between B and E. There are now two large groups of students taking AVCE in Year 12. Portfolios of students' work in Year 13 contain comprehensive notes and a good understanding of basic business concepts. Students have attained well above average examination results from following the established assignments for the course. The close guidance that students receive from teachers supporting their work on these assignments is very effective in enabling them to achieve these impressive results. New more focused assignments are being developed to support work on the marketing unit.

286. Business courses, along with those in leisure and recreation, provide a good vocational option for students on advanced courses. They can be combined with the full range of other advanced courses and thus contribute to the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum.

287. Overall, teaching and learning are good, and the teaching of some groups is very good. In one Year 12 class, students were given excellent support for their work in groups. They produced good presentations and supporting notes on how the work of different motivational theorists might be used to improve management of human resources. Although at an early stage in their course, these students showed a convincing understanding of the contributions of individual theorists. They responded positively to the high expectations of their enthusiastic teacher.

288. Teachers give students good support in all classes, though in some there is a lack of challenge and pace. Not enough use is made of students' prior and wider knowledge, gained out of school. For example, in a lesson about the impact of monetary policy on business behaviour, inadequate time was given to allow students to explore their understanding of the nature of interest rates. Similarly, in a class on training strategies, inadequate attention was given to the use of students' experiences of part-time working.

289. Teachers make good use of information and communication technology to aid learning of business concepts. Powerpoint is used to help students to structure presentations. Their use of specialist software speeds up the processes associated with the design of questionnaires and the analysis of results. Students respond readily to the variety of tasks, and those spoken to were very positive about their course. They were also very clear that GCSE business provided a good foundation for work at A level, and they were correct in regarding the AVCE course as much more demanding.

290. The vocational nature of this subject is not always given sufficient emphasis, and greater use could be made of the development of closer links with the very rich resources available in the local business community. The newly appointed head of faculty has already had a significantly helpful impact in helping her colleagues to maintain good standards and adapt to the changes required by the new AVCE qualification.

## Economics

Overall the quality of provision is **very good**.

### Strengths

- Very good results at A level and AS level over time;
- High standards of students' written work;
- Very good teaching. Teachers have expert subject knowledge and organise their courses well;
- Very good management of the subject.

### Areas for improvement

- To monitor and evaluate recruitment and performance of girls in the subject.

291. Results at A level have been strong over time. Only one student has failed since 1995, and there is a record of consistently very high pass rates at grades A and B. Results declined in 2001. All students who took the examination passed it, but the retention rate of students on the course was low for the first time, and the proportion scoring grades A or B fell to a quarter of candidates. Nonetheless, this group of students did better in economics than in other subjects on average, and their achievement in relation to their GCSE grades was satisfactory. Performance at AS level in 2001 was strong. Of the high number of students entered, almost all passed, with half gaining grades A or B, and a large proportion of these students are continuing their studies to A level. The number of girls taking the A level examination has declined year-on-year since 1998 and low numbers make statistical judgement of performance unreliable. Boys, overall, achieve well in relation to their GCSE scores.

292. In work seen, standards are well above average, as in the last inspection, and achievement is good. Students have a well-developed sense of the influence of economics on everyday life, such as the ways in which changing interest rates affect the whole economy. They have a very secure grasp of appropriate terminology, and Year 13 students recall theoretical tools like "aggregate demand" and "supply functions" to help them analyse the inflationary impact of changes in demand. Standards of literacy are generally good. Students write well and use evidence to support their analysis of problems. Their numerical skills are sound, and they have a good grasp of key principles such as total, marginal and



average relationships. However, Year 13 made mistakes when sketching graphs showing cost and revenue, by recalling their shapes without thinking of the values represented by the functions. They use computers very effectively to undertake research and to prepare reports for coursework.

293. Students have very positive views of the subject. They particularly appreciate the very clear organisation and structure of their courses, and the clear feedback on their attainment and progress.

294. Teaching and learning are very good. Three out of the four lessons seen were very good and one was good. Teachers have expert knowledge of their subject and of the examination specifications and structure. Explanations are, therefore, very clear, reinforced by good diagrammatic explanations on the whiteboard and use of overhead transparencies for giving information. The teaching is very well structured, dividing the course into units that clearly specify the learning that needs to occur. Students must, therefore, take responsibility for learning key definitions and reading important textual references in addition to work set by their teachers. Marking of work is mostly very detailed and helpful, using, where appropriate, criteria used by the examination board. Students are regularly tested and their notes and files checked, ensuring that they are kept in good order. Students work hard and recognise areas of weakness in which they need to improve. Relationships in classes are good, but quieter girls in Year 12 are sometimes not fully involved in discussions in a class heavily weighted towards boys.

295. Leadership and management of the subject are very good. The department checks and analyses results carefully to identify areas of courses in which teaching and learning can be improved, and sets clear targets for action as a consequence. There are adequate resources, which have broadened since the last inspection, with increasing use of the Internet and a broad range of textbooks. However, there are few formal curricular links with business for work other than coursework. Overall, expectations are very high, and there is a strong commitment throughout the department to meet these expectations.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)**

296. Information and communication technology was sampled on this inspection. The subject was examined in the school for the first time at AS level in 2001, with very good results. Almost all passed, with one student in three attaining the higher, A or B, grades. This represented good achievement for the pupils concerned given their earlier GCSE results. Two lessons were observed, and both were characterised by the mature and professional approach taken by students to the planning of projects. In a very good Year 12 lesson, the teacher's background in project planning in industry spurred students to research and plan good quality PowerPoint presentations on the importance of information technology in society. They fed back clearly and confidently on their findings in a plenary session. In another good and well managed lesson in Year 13, students reflected carefully on ways of improving their approach to coursework by evaluating their own AS coursework-projects, and comparing their views with those of the assessor.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

297. The school does not make provision in this curriculum area, although as part of their community service, some students work with pupils at a nearby special school. Some students accompany pupils from this school on a week's residential experience at Tirabad, and gain much personally from this challenging experience.

## **HOSPITALITY, SPORTS, LEISURE AND TRAVEL**

298. The focus was on AVCE leisure and recreation and GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism, but physical education and sports studies were also sampled. Provision for physical education and sports studies is very good. Teaching of very high quality helps students to develop their knowledge, understanding and skills, and to solve problems independently. Five lessons were observed, and all were very good. Resources for learning, and student attitudes are also very good. While exam results were slightly below average in 2000, they have generally been at or above national averages since the last inspection. Students with physical impairment, who are provided for in the unit for students with special educational needs, enjoy recreational physical education and participate very well along with other students. Results of the AVCE leisure and tourism course in 2001 were very good, with four of ten candidates attaining distinctions and the rest merits.

## Leisure

The provision for leisure courses (leisure & recreation AVCE, leisure & tourism intermediate GNVQ) is **very good**.

### Strengths

- Very good teaching;
- Well planned learning activities;
- Excellent use of activities that make students think about the way in which their work can apply in a vocational context;
- Development of skills needed for students to learn independently.

### Areas for improvement

- None.

299. AVCE leisure and recreation is a new course, established in September 2000. Results of assessments to date indicate that high standards will be achieved. GNVQ intermediate leisure and tourism has run for three years and good results have been achieved. In 2001, one student from a group of ten gaining a distinction and six others gaining merits. These results represented good achievement for these students from their earlier GCSE standards.

300. Standards of attainment seen in work on the inspection were well above expectation for leisure and recreation, and above expectation for leisure and tourism. Students achieve well. In both courses, students have a good understanding of the structure of the industries they are exploring. AVCE students, for example, made a clear distinction between the role of the public and private sectors in the provision of sporting facilities. Students are confident in their discussion of important issues in leisure, recreation and tourism. They use the Internet and other resources well to build their knowledge and develop their awareness of current issues.

301. Leisure and recreation courses provide a useful vocational option for students on advanced courses. They can be combined with the full range of other advanced courses and thus contribute to the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum in the sixth form.

302. Teaching and learning are very good in all lessons. Both intermediate and advanced courses are very well planned, and students are provided with a wide range of different tasks, all of which have a very clear vocational context. Students in Year 13 undertake risk

assessments of different aspects of school activities and achieve very well. Those taking intermediate courses are expected to report on the effectiveness of different companies that sell holidays abroad, and they manage this work competently. Other students use their experiences of local leisure facilities to evaluate the effectiveness of public and private provision of opportunities for sport.

303. All teachers share high expectations of what students should attain. Classroom and homework activities are clearly focused to achieve successful outcomes. Requirements are made explicit to students, and their response is wholehearted and enthusiastic. The pace of lessons is good. Close and quick questioning of students is used to clarify understanding and there are good links between different learning activities. Students in Year 12 have to plan sporting activities for younger students. These plans have to be presented to other members of the teaching group, refined in the light of their comments, and then translated into actual training sessions for younger pupils. Students are able to choose those sports with which they are most familiar and this helps them to develop confidence in tackling the development of new skills.

304. Teachers on these courses tend to be experienced in sports and physical education. They are able to use their skills and contacts to help create very realistic vocational contexts. Good and appropriate use is made of information and communication technology, for example, in creating activities to demonstrate the shortcoming of the Internet as a resource for learning, and in an emphasis on “fitness for purpose” in discussion of the use of different media for presentations.

305. The range and variety of activities used to teach leisure courses create very positive responses from students. The careful structuring and planning of activities to take account of the particular learning needs of individual students ensures that all develop appropriate study skills. Relationships between staff and students are excellent, and contribute further to the development of confident and mature learners. Both girls and boys choose to follow the courses available. One student in Year 13 explained how the course had helped her with her choice of career, while others indicated that they were much more prepared to take responsibility for their own learning.

306. Leadership of these courses is very good. The head of faculty communicates an infectious enthusiasm for the success and contribution to the curriculum made by vocational subjects. He has developed a good range of links with outside organisations and is anxious to ensure even higher standards.

## **VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS AND MEDIA**

307. The focus was on drama and music, but art and design and media studies were also sampled. In art and design, results have improved over time. AS results in 2001 were very good, with nine out of thirteen students obtaining passes at grade C or above. At A level, eight out of ten students obtained passes at grade C or above. Two lessons were observed. In a very good and stimulating lesson, Year 12 students carried forward good techniques from GCSE to demonstrate the expressive nature of colour. In another very good lesson, articulate and confident Year 13 students demonstrated excellent painting and drawing skills. The Bauhaus study by one student was striking in its depth of research and quality of presentation. Media studies was also sampled. All students passed at AS level in 2001, and half gained A or B grades, indicating well above average standards of attainment and good achievement in a new area of study. In the one Year 13 lesson observed, good teaching provided effective support when needed, but students showed independence in making good progress on presentations of projects. They were able to comment intelligently on the impact of humour, ‘reality TV’ and timing in advertisements for a teenage audience.

## Drama

Overall, provision is now **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Practical skills in performance are good. Students use their voices effectively and understand how productions should make an impact on the audience;
- Partnership with a neighbouring school has increased numbers taking the course and widened access to accommodation and equipment of very good quality;
- Teaching is now good. The new head of department is emphasising the importance of written work and examination-technique.

### Areas for improvement

- Last year's A level results were below average. Students did not achieve the higher grades that had been expected of them given their prior attainment;
- Students' written work is unsatisfactory. Extended writing is too brief, too descriptive and often with careless errors in spelling and grammar.

308. Standards in A level theatre studies and drama have been below average since the last inspection. In 2001, the first year in which candidates have taken the A level examination for some time, the proportion of students gaining at least a pass and those gaining grades A or B were both below the national average. Most students did not achieve in line with their prior attainment as indicated by GCSE grades and teachers' predictions. Students on the AS course, though, did attain in line with their prior attainment. All three passed in the range of grades B to C, and all have continued on to the Year 13 A level course.

309. Below average standards at A level were confirmed in the analysis of students' work, but not in the lessons seen. Students reach higher standards in practical work than they do in their written work. The weakness in their written work lies in the lack of development and very little reference to line of text, specific incident or character. There is little evaluation by students of their own performance or of productions they have seen. When writing is lengthier, it is descriptive rather than analytical or evaluative. For example, the background of Greek drama was recounted with little selection of what was relevant to an essay on "Antigone". One higher-attaining student was able to link language with insights into character, but this was the exception. Students make simple grammatical errors, often repeat ideas and, although fluent, do not use specialist vocabulary. Teaching is beginning to address these problems. By contrast, in their practical work, students are able to plan a production, mindful of the stage space and its effective use. On stage, they use their voices well, conveying sound understanding of the text. Students can discuss different approaches and, for example, in one lesson, considered whether a Brechtian approach would enhance the scene. Standards in lessons meet expectations.

310. Standards in AS lessons are similar. Greater emphasis is now laid upon written work. Already students have covered a more extensive range of texts than has been the practice in recent years. Photocopied notes have been annotated. Specialist concepts and vocabulary, such as 'catharsis', have been thoroughly explored. At this point of the autumn term, little critical writing has been completed. However, most students are still writing too generally, without detailed reference. The quality of writing is not high. Grammatical errors

are made and vocabulary is not extensive. A few students have little experience of drama and their performance skills have improved from a low base to be now satisfactory. They have a good knowledge of "Antigone" and are able to discuss interpretations of Creon and Haemon in some detail. They are just beginning to use body and facial expression to good effect. Overall, attainment meets national expectations.

311. The quality of teaching is now good. Teachers have good subject knowledge, which is used effectively to initiate discussion and planning. When students need further help, teachers immediately provide it. Lessons are carefully planned so that no aspect is overlooked when, for example, a performance is being prepared. Throughout lessons, there is good balance between giving students independence to carry out their own ideas and intervention to guide them further. Sufficient attention is now paid to written work and examination technique.

312. As a result of good teaching, learning is good. Students are deeply involved in their stage-work. They evaluate what they are doing constantly and, therefore, make good progress in improving it. Year 13 students are confident in explaining their ideas and challenging one another's suggestions. Year 12 students are more hesitant, but they too make good progress as they follow teachers' demonstrations and reflect upon their performances. All written work is now carefully marked. Teachers have made it clear what examination boards expect and they are giving students grades that reflect those standards. Students receive clear advice on how to improve.

313. Teachers' absence in the past has adversely affected attainment. The newly appointed head of drama has analysed examination results and taken steps to raise them. The progress of individuals is carefully recorded and tracked. The development of the A level course has doubled the number of students for practical work and expanded their experience of teaching, equipment and staging. The school's own accommodation is satisfactory, though a few lessons are held in a cramped recreational space, but a second studio is already planned. Equipment, particularly lighting, is now being properly maintained and will be in full use again shortly.

## Music

Overall the quality of provision is **very good**.

### Strengths

- Very good teaching and learning. Lessons include a good range of activities which very effectively help students to build up their knowledge and understanding;
- Students share ideas freely and work very well together.  
Areas for improvement
- Time allocated for A level music on the timetable is short compared with most institutions, putting students and staff under considerable pressure to achieve in the time allowed.

314. A level results in 2000 were above average. Although only one of the five students entered attained grade B, none scored less than a grade D. A level results in 2001 showed one candidate obtaining a B pass and two candidates obtaining grade D. At AS level in 2001, both girls entered gained A grades. These results represent good achievement for the students concerned and very good value-added from GCSE.

315. Standards in Year 13 lessons observed are very good, as might be expected from students who obtained grade A at AS level last year. Their pastiche compositions in the style of Schoenberg show a good level of understanding of serial techniques. Candidates have adequate but improving performance skills. Course files show very good research into such subjects as twentieth century music, the development of the symphony and excellent productivity in the volume of work completed. Analytical listening skills are well developed.

316. Teaching is very good and virtually on a one-to-one basis, given the small number of students. Teaching ensures that learning is very good, and overcomes difficulties connected with the very few students following the subject and the short time for lessons. Students' level of interest is high and the pace of lessons never flags. Students' levels of attainment are well known, and the content of lessons effectively helps them to build up their musical knowledge and understanding. Marking is thorough and generously annotated with helpful observations to enable the students to progress further and achieve even more highly.

317. Students learn very successfully. They respond well to the supportive teaching and different approaches that they encounter. They confidently use books and computers in their researches and spend substantial amounts of time on studies and musical practice. They co-operate productively, for example in the composition and performance of neo-classical compositions based on a Mozart sonata for flute and piano.

318. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The department is under energetic new leadership that has created a strong impact in a short space of time. Much encouragement is given to students to perform. Good use is made of performance indicators to see how the department and individual students can improve. As A level music is provided for two students only, the course receives six rather than the eight periods that are usually allocated for most A level subjects in the school. Students and staff are under considerable pressure to work their way through the specifications of the subject syllabus in the time allocated.

## **HUMANITIES**

319. The focus was on geography and history, but psychology, religious education and sociology were also sampled. Results in A level psychology were above average in 2000 and an above average proportion of A and B grades were attained. Results in 2001 were similar. Most students achieve what they should. AS results in 2001 were strong and equipped students for A level. Of the four lessons seen, all were at least satisfactory. Two were of very good quality, providing stimulating and challenging learning experiences for students, who are highly committed to the subject.

320. In religious education, average A level standards were attained in 2000. In 2001, all students passed at AS level, and half gained A or B grades. In lessons and work seen, students are achieving highly. They make very good use of critical analysis and present balanced arguments very well. In one lesson, they made moral judgements concerning the fundamental principles in Kant's "Critique of Pure Reason". Students research independently and, with very good guidance from the teacher, are developing their analytical and judgemental skills very well. Teaching is always very good.

321. In sociology, attainment at A level was well above average for the three years to 2000. Average results were attained in 2001, but students generally did as well as predicted. AS results provided a suitable basis for students to continue to A level. Over time, students have achieved well in the subject. In the two lessons observed, teaching was very good and excellent. The outstanding feature of the teaching is the way in which it helps students gain

a sympathetic understanding of individuals or groups experiencing social, economic or political pressures from forces such as globalisation. Students have a very good understanding of key sociological theories and a good grasp of key terms to help them express their views clearly and confidently.

## Geography

Overall provision for geography is **very good**.

### Strengths

- Very good teaching;
- Students' progress in learning and the monitoring of this by teachers;
- Students' positive attitudes to the subject.

### Areas for improvement

- None.

322. At A level, the numbers who attained A and B grades were above the national average in 1998, 2000 and 2001. In 1999 they were average. Girls have often performed better than boys. They have consistently attained above average results, while boys were above in 2000 but slightly below in the provisional 2001 results. Almost all students have gained an A level pass in recent years. Entry levels can sometimes be small and the personal circumstances of one student have sometimes distorted results. Usually good numbers of girls and boys take the subject. In 2000, a high percentage of students exceeded their predicted grades based on previous GCSE performance, and this continued an upward trend from the previous year. Students achieve well, making good progress often from good GCSE grades. Many of the current Year 13 groups, with mainly B grades from their GCSE examinations, are working at B and C grade levels at A level. In Year 12, students in lessons are achieving very well.

323. Students found the work for the AS course in 2001 difficult, and those attempting the examination with C grades from GCSE experienced considerable difficulty. Fourteen boys performed better than girls; all passed the examination and over half attained A or B grades. Girls did a little less well overall, but numbers of entrants were too small to make comparison valid. Most students complete their A level courses, though some leave at the end of Year 12 for other opportunities. Of the 24 students who enrolled for the AS course in 2000, all but one completed it.

324. Attainment seen in work and in lessons is very high. Students in both Years 12 and 13 have a good range of writing styles. They accumulate a large volume of well-taken and useful notes and extend their skills in essays, something that students who joined the sixth form from other schools had not experienced enough at GCSE. Students have a good command of technical vocabulary and the confidence to use it in the classroom, as in a Year 13 lesson where students explained differences in isostatic and eustatic movement. Students are confident and competent to prepare and deliver presentations in class. For example, Year 12 students devised and presented methods of preventing flooding in Bangladesh very well. Students have good geographical knowledge that enables them to defend and to question aspects of their work effectively. They have a good understanding of

geographical processes and patterns, seen demonstrated in a Year 13 lesson in which physical features in different locations and circumstances were correctly identified. Students have steadily built on the skills learned in earlier years to devise hypotheses and manage enquiry in order to reach valid judgements and conclusions.

325. Teaching was never less than good and very good in three out of four lessons seen. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and teach to their strengths. While they are constantly revisiting previously learned skills with students, they are, at the same time, challenging them to extend their knowledge, and providing them with good, up-to-date book and website references to widen their understanding. In conversation, students confirm the volume of work undertaken, but recognise the helpful and sympathetic attitudes of teachers and greatly value the help that they are given.

326. Teachers maintain a good pace in lessons and use very carefully chosen audio-visual material to increase their impact. One feature of lessons is the constant reminder to students that they are working at a higher level than ever before and that their methods and skills should match this level. Teachers do not give students all required information. They are expected to think for themselves and use initiative in approaches to their work, as seen in a lesson on coastal problems. Teachers continually encourage students to consider topics from different perspectives, requiring them to consider the consequences of their ideas. Students are familiar with using formulae and geographical models, and teachers regularly require this of them. They are able to analyse statistical tables and draw conclusions, seen in a lesson on tourism in the less economically developed world.

327. Students learn well. They behave very well and attitudes are very good, and excellent in many cases. Students with special education needs are very well supported and one was fully included in all activities, playing a valuable and knowledgeable part in lessons despite physical disability. On an occasion when this student was absent, his learning support assistant attended the lesson and provided very good support by taking notes for his later use. Students with special needs achieve very well. Relationships among students are very good and they have trust and confidence in their teachers. Students work well individually, and particularly well in groups without close supervision. Their knowledge and skills grow from the exchange of ideas.

328. Leadership of a committed, well-organised team is very good. One of its strengths is the careful monitoring of progress, which ensures that students maintain high standards and that teaching continues to improve. This is a department that is producing highly skilled and committed geographers.



## History

Overall the quality of provision is **very good**.

### Strengths

- Teaching is good and some is very good. Teachers' subject knowledge is strong;
- Students have mature attitudes to the subject;
- Students have strong independent learning skills and produce detailed arguments on complex issues;
- The provision of resources produced by teachers is comprehensive, well adapted to individual needs of students and supports their learning well;
- A level results are usually well above the national average.

### Areas for improvement

- None.

329. Results at A level in the past three years have been consistently well above the national average. All students who took the examination in these years attained pass grades. Over half gained A or B grades. Boys and girls attain equally well. A level results in 2001 were well in line with the high standards of previous years. All passed the AS examination in 2001, and over half the students attained A or B grades, which is a greater proportion than in most other subjects. The students who undertake courses usually complete them, reflecting their commitment and interest in the subject. Students achieve very well at A level, often attaining higher standards than might reasonably have been expected from their GCSE results.

330. Observation of lessons and analysis of students' work confirm that students are achieving at an above average standard. In Year 12, students are able to examine Lenin's "Testament" critically, discuss the role of Trotsky and analyse the struggle for power following Lenin's death. Students' contributions in lessons are thoughtful and well considered, and the whole group contributes to the discussion. They are encouraged to consider written evidence and then to make notes on the documents unseen. This encourages close reading and focus on the key points of an issue. In Year 13, students are able to research a wide range of texts and sources, including the Internet, with confidence and success. A debate examining the historian G. R. Elton's views on the revolution in Tudor government followed this personal research. Students' analysis and insight into the full range of the historian's views were impressive. The students were confident, articulate and mature in their positions and opinions. The flow and pace of the debate produced great energy and excitement and arguments of a very high order.

331. Teaching is good and some is very good. Students learn very well and much progress results from very good, effective and enthusiastic teaching. Lessons are well organised, supported by a wide range of very good resource material produced by teachers. Students are constantly challenged to express their thoughts and views, and this process produces enthusiastic, well-motivated students who show much mature understanding in their study of the subject. The range of activity that teaching brings to classes is impressive. Brainstorming, discussion in pairs and groups, individual research, analysis of issues by a class, and expert teacher-led discussion all contribute to the consistently high levels of achievement in the subject. Teachers' subject knowledge and skills of teaching ensure that students progress very well.

332. The rapport between teachers and students is very positive and underpins the enthusiasm that students have for the subject. Students have confidence in the good teaching they receive and are clear what they need to do to achieve well. They are committed and motivated to learn. They respond very well to the challenge of the subject and are strongly supported to do well. Marking and evaluation of their work are thorough, with many useful comments on their writing, ensuring that they know what they need to do to improve. The consequent improvement in the content and quality of their work is marked over the course.

333. Leadership and management of the subject are good. The new head of department has a clear view of priorities and is well organised and committed not only to maintaining the current high level of success, but to improving standards further.

## **ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION**

334. The focus was on English and French, but Spanish was also sampled. In Spanish, results were broadly in line with the national average for 2000, but small entries make statistics unreliable. Results were above average in 1999 and well above in 1998. In 2001, all four students passed at A level, but none attained A or B grades. At AS level in 2001, all four students passed and the two girls entered gained grade B. Two lessons were observed, and both were, at least, very good. In one, the excellent quality of teaching supported comprehension and research skills, enabling students to find their way through a wealth of authentic material and draw reasoned conclusions. This resulted in students working very well together, where they became increasingly fluent and natural in their use of Spanish.

### **English**

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

#### **Strengths**

- High standards of attainment and achievement;
- The leadership of the head of department;
- Teaching, which is very good overall;
- Students' very positive attitudes to learning.

#### **Areas for improvement**

- None.

335. Standards of attainment are well above average. Pupils achieve at least as well as expected, given their prior attainment, and very well overall. This judgement is consistent with the pattern of the department's results in recent years.

336. In 2000, a well above average proportion of students attained A or B grades in A level English literature, and all attained grades in the range A to E. In 2001, A level provisional figures show that a high proportion of students attained A or B grades and all students achieved grades in the range A to D. Provisional results for Year 12 students

taking AS level examinations in 2001 were very good. Almost all attained pass grades and over half attained A or B grades. Results in 2001 were well in line with the well-above average standards usually attained. Students achieved very well, adding considerable value to their levels of attainment at GCSE.

337. Current Year 12 students, although still at an early stage in their English literature course, are making good progress. They are gaining confidence in their ability to tackle the greater ambiguities and complexities posed by their set texts at this level. This was so in a lesson on Margaret Atwood's novel "The Handmaid's Tale", where students began to understand the undercover-role of one of the characters and how it was hinted at in the text. Students in another group studying "Much Ado About Nothing" were already working together well and had the confidence and ability to construct and perform a little dance and mime sequence to show their understanding of the significance of dance in the play. A Year 13 class studying "Othello" clearly showed the advance in learning they had made by producing their own versions of speeches in the language and style of one of the play's characters. They had looked carefully at the text and were able to pick out key phrases that delineated character most succinctly. Students in another Year 13 class were able to make thoughtful and perceptive analyses of character and motivation in Truman Capote's, "In Cold Blood". One group prepared and presented an impassioned defence of one of the main characters. In all, the quality of these contributions was well above average.

338. Teaching and learning are very good overall. Teachers' own knowledge and understanding of set texts enhance students' learning. They foster independent learning by encouraging preliminary reading, note taking and presentations to the class. They choose interesting and challenging ways to involve students in their learning. In lessons seen, these included: probing questioning about the symbolism of "The Handmaid's Tale", the creation of a dance to establish its significance in "Much Ado About Nothing", research into the speech patterns of characters in "Othello", and the individual and group presentations about "In Cold Blood". The latter was an excellent lesson in which the teacher effectively drew together the strands of a discussion so that students were always aware of the judgements they needed to be making about the structure of the text and the key passages for comment. Overall, as a result of very good teaching, students are making very good gains in knowledge and understanding, and learning to take responsibility for their own learning to a substantial extent.

339. Leadership and management are very good. The head of department provides mature and cultured leadership to a strong team of teachers. Standards of attainment and teaching have improved since the last inspection. Students continue to show very positive attitudes to their work.

## French

Overall the quality of provision is **very good**.

### Strengths

- Results are consistently well above average;
- Students are achieving very well, using the language confidently and competently in all skills;
- Teaching is very good, promoting the natural use of the language for all purposes and developing students' thoughts, ideas and opinions over a wide range of relevant topics;
- Students work enthusiastically and very well together; they are especially mature in discussion;
- The subject is very well led; a very good range of resources, especially information and communication technology, supports the use of authentic language.

### Areas for improvement

- None.

340. A level results were well above average in 2000, the latest year for which comparisons are available, and high standards have been maintained over several years. All students gained a pass grade. Two-thirds of candidates gained grades A or B. Candidates' performances in French were above those in other subjects, to an extent significantly better than the situation nationally. Few boys choose to study the subject. Where they have done so, they have done as well and sometimes better than girls. Only girls took French in 2000. In the AS examinations in 2001, ten of the eleven candidates gained grades A or B. Boys and girls did equally well. All high achievers continued their studies into the A level course in Year 13.

341. The standards of work of current students in the A level course are well above average. In Year 13, students are achieving very well in relation to their GCSE results and are sustaining very high standards. In the lessons seen, they were doing very well because the challenging teaching that they received did not stop at the demands of grade A attainment. Instead, for example, without recourse to a word of English, the teacher used probing questions to stimulate ideas and expression so that opinions on politics and current affairs were rigorously challenged and defended in authentic and idiomatic language. As a result, students show signs even of thinking in French. This was amply demonstrated by one student who continued a conversation outside the classroom in fluent French. She was fully caught up in the views she was expressing, but for a moment quite unaware of the language when she addressed a baffled English speaker. Written work also reveals accurate, mature expression and wide vocabulary, including examples of correct use of technical language where appropriate.

342. Students in Year 12 are only a little way into their course but are achieving much as expected. They are developing the four linguistic skills of listening, speaking, reading, and writing well, with no obvious imbalances between them. They are moving on from their GCSE work into more complex grammar and more mature and authentic use of language. One or two show a little carelessness at times, making elementary mistakes in pieces of extended writing, but this is not common.

343. Teaching is very good overall and students learn very well as a result. The principal features of teaching are very good planning and assessment. The way in which teachers manage to connect the curriculum firmly to real life is impressive. Teachers are very good linguists so they promote the almost exclusive use of French within lessons. In consequence, the lessons become discussions on politics, current affairs, literary criticism and more, which just happen to be conducted in French. Grammatical points are well integrated, so students' language builds in range and accuracy without the flow of communication being lost.

344. Students learn very well. They are confident in expressing themselves, putting forward and defending views. They conduct discussions maturely and with respect for others. They use linguistic expression and newly acquired vocabulary well to build up fluency. They work well independently, under a supported self-study programme, and show initiative in research, seeking out native speakers to interview. They show great interest and enthusiasm for their work, including taking opportunities to travel to France. Several intend to pursue careers using foreign languages.

345. Very good subject leadership and management support the high quality of teaching and learning, with strong commitment to maintaining high standards. Faculty documentation identifies a range of approaches to encourage effective learning. Information and communication technology, particularly the Virtual Language Laboratory, contributes authentic support material and realistic conditions for learning. Students' progress is clearly plotted so that the most effective challenges are set to ensure the best possible results.