

INSPECTION REPORT

THE NOBEL SCHOOL

Stevenage

LEA area: Hertfordshire

Unique reference number: 117530

Headteacher: Mr R Whatmough

Reporting inspector: Mr D P Cosway
2734

Dates of inspection: 12 – 16 March 2001

Inspection number: 189282

Short 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 to 18 years
Gender of pupils:	Mixed
School address:	The Nobel School Mobbsbury Way Stevenage Herts
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Appropriate authority:	The governing body
Name of chair of governors:	Mr A Peary
Date of previous inspection:	September 1996

INFORMATION ABOUT THE INSPECTION TEAM

Team members			Subject responsibilities	Aspect responsibilities
2734	Paul Cosway	<i>Registered inspector</i>		What sort of school is it? How high are standards? a) The school's results and achievements. b) Pupils' attitudes, values and personal developments. How well are pupils taught? How well is the school led and managed?
13807	Christine Haggerty	<i>Lay inspector</i>		How well does the school care for its pupils? How well does the school work in partnership with parents? Community links.
18950	Carmen Rodney	<i>Team inspector</i>	English.	How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to pupils?
15606	Christine Humphreys	<i>Team inspector</i>	Design and technology.	Teaching.
18888	Jan Boulton	<i>Team inspector</i>	Physical education.	Assessment.
19135	Derek Ebbage	<i>Team inspector</i>	'A' Level mathematics.	Principles of best value; finance
17171	Mary Last	<i>Team inspector</i>	Special educational needs.	Co-ordinator of the Sixth Form inspection
19043	David Lewis	<i>Team inspector</i>	Science; Mathematics.	
10782	Henry Moreton	<i>Team inspector</i>	History.	Staffing, resources and accommodation.
27368	Michael Merchant	<i>Team inspector</i>	Geography; Sociology.	
18447	Ron Cohen	<i>Team inspector</i>	Economics, Business intermediate and advanced.	

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

The school is average in size, having 1071 pupils: 470 boys and 601 girls, aged between 11 and 18. Of these, 82 boys and 116 girls are in the Sixth Form, which offers a broad range of A Level and vocational courses. The school serves the north east of Stevenage. The social and economic circumstances of the area match the national picture, except that fewer adults than is the average nationally have higher education qualifications. Levels of unemployment are relatively low and so the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals (9.2 per cent) is below average.

Most pupils are white, although there is a larger proportion than nationally (2.4 per cent) of pupils for whom English is an additional language. The proportion of pupils with statements of special educational needs is broadly average. There are 191 pupils on the register of special educational need, of whom five are in the Sixth Form. Of the nine with statements, just over half have specific learning difficulties. Some others have emotional or behavioural difficulties and there are individuals with speech or communication problems or physical disability. The attainment of pupils on entry is about average.

This was a short inspection, but included an additional focus on the provision for pupils with special educational needs and a pilot inspection of the Sixth Form.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

This is a very good school, with many excellent aspects. Pupils achieve very well. From average attainment on entry, attainment in the Year 9 national tests has been consistently above the national average for the last four years. In GCSE examinations, attainment has been above average over the same period and well above that in similar schools. The overall quality of teaching is very good and as a result of this and the very good ethos in the school, pupils learn very well, developing very good learning skills, learning to work independently and co-operatively. The Sixth Form is successful and cost effective. The leadership and management of the school are excellent, providing clear direction and monitoring the work of the school very effectively. The school has good links with parents. The school gives very good value for money.

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

- Pupils achieve very well. They attain standards well above average when compared to similar schools in GCSE examinations and well above average when compared to national averages in the Sixth Form.
- Pupils develop excellent attitudes to school and they work very hard, realising the importance of study. Their behaviour is very good. These are significant factors in the academic progress they make.
- Relationships and pupils' personal development are excellent and these contribute to the progress that pupils make by ensuring that they take their work seriously and respect their teachers.
- Teaching is very good overall, with much that is excellent, and this leads to pupils learning very well.
- The leadership and management focus very successfully on the raising of attainment. The school has received awards for outstanding improvement, in recognition of it being one of the most improved schools in the country.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- As the school has recognised, boys make good progress during their time in the school, but girls make very good progress. A working party has been set up to find further ways to enhance boys' learning and this work needs to continue. A key focus is on the raising of boys' levels of literacy.

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

HOW THE SCHOOL HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in September, 1996. Since that time, the school has sustained above average performance in GCSE examinations and has raised attainment significantly in the Sixth Form: from average levels to well above average. Well-planned and focused staff development has succeeded in raising the quality of teaching even higher than it was in 1996. There has been significant improvement in the use of assessment data to ensure that all pupils are stretched and are making good progress. This was a key issue in the last report and is now a strength of the school. The work of the school is being monitored highly effectively and the results of this are fed back to teachers to show them how to improve the effectiveness of their teaching.

The key issues from the last report have been addressed and are no longer areas for concern. The issue about the lack of opportunity for pupils to exercise responsibility has been dealt with particularly well. This self-critical and evaluative school is fully committed to constantly reviewing its performance and finding new ways to make its work with pupils even more effective. There has been very significant improvement since the last inspection and the promise of many further improvements to come.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	all schools			similar schools
	1998	1999	2000	2000
GCSE examinations	B	B	B	A
A and AS Level	D	B	A	N/A

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

At the end of Year 9, attainment in the national tests has been above average overall for the last four years and well above average compared with similar schools.

At the end of Year 11, the proportion of pupils who attained five or more GCSE grades A* - C in the Year 2000, 72 per cent, was particularly high. It was well above the national average and very high compared with similar schools, placing this school in the top 5 per cent of similar schools.

The proportions who attained five or more grades A* - G and who attained at least one GCSE grade G were also well above the national average. Both boys and girls attain better at this school than they do on average nationally, although girls attain better overall than boys at the end of Year 9 and in GCSE and the difference is slightly greater than the difference nationally.

The school's most recent GCSE examination and A Level results were the best ever and show how the school is continuing to improve. The most successful subjects at GCSE in 2000 were German, music, science, drama, mathematics, art and physical education. The subject that performed least well compared with others in the school, although still better than the average nationally, was English language. Pupils make good progress in English, however, and their attainment reflects their levels of literacy on entry to the school.

In the Sixth Form, pupils gain well above average results. Overall results in the GCE Advanced and GNVQ advanced and intermediate level courses show that pupils have made very good progress from their results in GCSE examinations at the age of 16. The best results in the Year 2000 were in general studies, sociology, German, history, economics and geography. Attainment was relatively lower in mathematics and physics, but the inspection has found that attainment is rising in these subjects. The school exceeded the targets it set for itself in 2000.

PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Excellent: almost all pupils have very positive attitudes to the school. They have a real desire to succeed, working hard and listening carefully to the advice their teachers offer in order to raise their attainment.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Very good: this helps to maintain a very good learning ethos. Lessons are purposeful and no time is wasted. Very good behaviour outside of class ensures that the school is a very orderly and friendly community.
Personal development and relationships	Excellent; pupils relate very well to teachers and to one another. They develop independence and learn to work well and co-operatively with others. They are respectful and considerate.
Attendance	Well above average. Attendance levels are well above the national average and this contributes to high attainment because pupils miss so few lessons.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

Teaching of pupils:	aged 11-14 years	aged 14-16 years	aged over 16 years
Lessons seen overall	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.

Teaching is satisfactory or better in 100 per cent of lessons. There were no unsatisfactory lessons. More than 60 per cent of teaching in the school is very good or excellent and almost 40 per cent is good.

Teachers' excellent knowledge of their subjects and the excellent relationships they have with their pupils are key strengths. They care for their pupils and give them excellent guidance to help them to learn, focusing on the skills and knowledge they need to succeed. The pupils understand that their teachers want to help them. They trust their advice and listen carefully and respectfully. Lessons are brisk, purposeful and inclusive. Teachers know well the strengths and weaknesses of all their pupils and ensure that every individual is both challenged and supported. The pupils respond very well to their teachers' high expectations of them. They are hard working, good listeners, know what to do to improve and make very good progress. The teaching of literacy and numeracy is generally good across the school, but there is still a minority of boys whose literacy skills are low and this affects their progress in many subjects. The strong and successful focus in the school over the past year on meeting the needs of boys in order to meet their needs in order to raise their attainment and motivation needs to continue and be strengthened further. In the Sixth Form, pupils are developing good independent learning skills, including research skills. They are mature and responsible learners.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good: the curriculum is broad and reasonably well balanced. There is a good range of GCE A Level courses and vocational courses in the Sixth Form. The wide provision for extra-curricular clubs and activities provides good opportunities for pupils to broaden their education.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Very good: the school offers an inclusive education that meets the needs of all pupils well.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	The relatively few pupils with English as an additional language receive good and appropriate teaching and support.
Provision for pupils' personal development, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Very good: the provision for moral and social education is excellent. The provision for cultural education is good, with an increasing awareness of the need to prepare pupils for life in a multi-cultural society. The provision for spiritual development is also very good. Although there is not an act of collective worship every day, the ones held are of a high quality.
How well the school cares for its pupils	Excellent. This is a very caring school, supporting pupils' personal and academic development very well indeed.

The school works very well in partnership with parents to help them to support their children's learning. The sharing and explaining of targets for learning with pupils and parents is a particular strength. Statutory requirements for the curriculum are met, except that religious education is not taught for sufficient time in the Sixth Form.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Excellent leadership from the headteacher and senior managers is setting high expectations and ensuring that the school has a very clear direction for future development. The senior managers have a vision of a learning community that enables all pupils to reach their highest possible levels of personal achievement. They are achieving this with the loyalty and support of the entire staff.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors fulfil their role very well; they are very involved in the work of the school, in deciding its future direction and in monitoring its work.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Excellent: a wide range of data and excellent review procedures ensure that the school is evaluating its own performance very thoroughly. This information is used very effectively to raise attainment.
The strategic use of resources	Very good: the teachers are deployed well and they make good use of the accommodation. Resources are used very effectively indeed.

The adequacy of staffing, accommodation and learning resources is good overall, with good match of teachers to the needs of the timetable. There is a good ratio of computers in the school, but, as the school has recognised, design and technology and physics require further specific information and communication technology equipment. The management of the school is particularly open, consultative and reflective. The leadership of subjects and of year groups is strong. The school seeks best value in its use of all of its funding and resources.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ninety-nine per cent of parents agree that expectations are high. Ninety-seven per cent believe that teaching is good and children make good progress. • Around 95 per cent agree that the school is managed well. They would feel comfortable approaching the school with any problems. They think that the school helps their children to become mature and responsible. Their children like coming to the school. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16 per cent of parents do not feel that they are kept well informed about how their children are getting on.

Parents are very pleased with their school. The inspection team agree that pupils make very good progress at the school and teachers have very high expectations of them. The quality of teaching is very good, with much excellent teaching. The leadership and management of the school are areas of considerable strength. The information they receive about the progress their children are making is good and a new improved reporting system is being trialled.

PART B: COMMENTARY

Pupils achieve very well. They attain standards well above average when compared to similar schools in GCSE examinations and well above average when compared to national averages in the Sixth Form.

1. The attainment of pupils on entry to the school is close to average overall. Analysis of the results of the end of Year 6 National Curriculum tests for primary school pupils who have entered the school over the last four years shows an improving picture and the present Year 7 intake was above average based on these test results. Cognitive ability tests, however, indicate that pupils are slightly below average overall. In the Year 6 National Curriculum tests for 2000, the latest intake of pupils performed much better in science than in English or mathematics. Almost all the entry attained at least Level 4, the expected level, in science, for example. This confirms a finding of the inspection that difficulties with literacy and numeracy, and especially literacy, are causing a significant proportion of boys to make less progress than girls as they move through the school.

Performance in the national tests at the end of Year 9

2. Results in English were well above the national average in 2000, after being above for the previous two years. They were well above those in similar schools. Attainment has been well above average in mathematics over the last four years, except for 1999, when it was above. It was well above that in similar schools in 2000. Attainment at the end of Year 9 in the National Curriculum tests in science has been well above average over recent years, but was above average in 2000. It was also above the average in similar schools.

3. Attainment at the end of Year 9 in the national tests has been above average overall for the last four years, but has improved less than the national trend. Attainment was well above that in similar schools in 2000.

Attainment in GCSE examinations

4. Attainment in GCSE examinations has been rising in the school in recent years. The proportion of pupils who have gained five or more GCSE passes at the higher grades, A* - C, has risen steadily from 36 per cent in 1996 to 72 per cent in 2000. This very significant increase compares with a rise of less than 5 per cent nationally in the same period. In recognition of this remarkable achievement, the school has received three awards for outstanding improvement from the Department of Education and Employment.

5. The average point score at GCSE has also increased over the same period. In 1996 it was below the national average at 34.7. In 2000, it was almost five points above the national average at 43.2. The reason it is not higher still is that the school enters pupils for fewer subjects than most schools, nine as against ten or eleven elsewhere. This policy is under review.

6. In 2000 in GCSE examinations, the proportions of pupils who attained five or more grades A* - G and one or more passes at these grades were well above the national average.
7. In many subjects, especially in drama, German, geography and music, pupils' attainment was well above the national average in the 2000 GCSE examinations. In German, for example, almost all of the 36 candidates attained a grade in the range A* - C, with over 40 per cent gaining an A* or A grade. Pupils made particularly good progress, relative to their progress in other subjects at the school, in German, music, science and geography.
8. The findings of the inspection are that current levels of attainment reflect the results of the national tests and GCSE examinations in 2000. Attainment is above average overall, despite the fact that the present Year 11 cohort has a higher proportion of pupils with special educational needs than in the previous year. The proportion of pupils who attain five or more GCSE passes at grades A* - C is likely to be slightly lower than in 2000. Nevertheless, pupils are continuing to make good progress and achieving very well. Attainment is again well above average in the Sixth Form.
9. Overall, attainment in literacy and numeracy is above average. GCSE examination results in 2000 support this. In English, all pupils gained a pass mark and the proportion passing at the higher grades, A* - C, was 12 per cent above the national figure. In mathematics, 98.7 per cent of pupils entered passed the examination and 16 per cent more than nationally gained a grade in the A* - C range. However, there is a difference in performance between boys and girls. In both subjects, girls attained better than boys and the difference was greater than that nationally. There is still a need to develop further the teaching of these two important skill areas, especially to raise further boys' attainment.

Pupils develop excellent attitudes to school and they work very hard, realising the importance of study. Their behaviour is very good. These are significant factors in the academic progress they make.

10. Attitudes throughout the school are excellent and the ethos is one that encourages and enables pupils to succeed. Almost all pupils have very positive attitudes to the school. They have a real desire to succeed, working hard and listening carefully to the advice their teachers offer in order to raise their attainment. Pupils enjoy coming to school, are enthusiastic learners and have a real interest in their education. They are proud of the school and realise that they are fortunate to be part of it.
11. Attendance is well above the national average. The vast majority of pupils arrive at school punctually. This allows the school day and lessons to begin on time in a calm atmosphere that prepares pupils well for the busy day ahead.
12. Behaviour is very good in lessons. The high quality of behaviour creates a very businesslike and purposeful ethos in classrooms that helps learning. Around the school, pupils are very sensible, well mannered and well behaved. When pupils are on work experience, representing the school or working as tour guides in school, the people they meet appreciate their good behaviour, good manners and positive attitudes. There has been only one permanent exclusion in the last year. The

behaviour of pupils with special educational needs is very good, including that of those who have behavioural difficulties when admitted to the school. Their attendance is good. Pupils with special educational needs are completely integrated into the activities enjoyed by the rest of the school and they have good opportunities for taking responsibility.

13. Relationships between teachers and pupils, and between pupils themselves, are of a high quality and create a supportive and caring atmosphere in which pupils feel secure and comfortable. They respect one another's feelings and are supportive of each other in lessons. There was good evidence of this in a drama lesson, in which Year 12 pupils worked for the first time with masks as part of their study of Ancient Greek theatre. It would have been easy to take a light-hearted approach and laugh at each other. On the contrary, the pupils approached the tasks, pair and small-group work, with the utmost seriousness and made great strides in their learning and in their understanding of the concepts behind Greek tragic acting as a result.

14. Pupils have excellent relationships with all the staff and the respect that they show to their teachers is a feature of the school. They understand that their teachers are there to help them to do well. They listen very carefully to what their teachers have to say and try hard to meet the high expectations that their teachers have of them. Pupils respond well to the good opportunities to take responsibility for their own learning. The need to give more responsibility was a key issue in the last report. It is now a considerable strength in the school. It manifests itself in the use of the library and information and communication technology facilities for research. It is also evident in the many opportunities outside of lessons that the school provides. Pupils are encouraged to initiate and take part in charity events, to mentor younger pupils, to act as counsellors and to be members of the lively and revitalised school council.

15. Parents are very pleased with the attitudes and behaviour that the school promotes. Almost all of those who responded to the questionnaire think that their children like coming to school and that the behaviour of pupils is good.

Teaching is very good overall, with much that is excellent, and this leads to pupils learning very well.

16. The quality of teaching in the school overall is very good. Almost all teaching is good, very good or excellent. There is no unsatisfactory teaching. There is excellent teaching in 15 per cent of lessons. Just under 46 per cent of teaching is very good. Almost all the rest, 38 per cent, is good. These are unusually high figures. Taking the school as a whole, it is very good across all year groups. The high quality of teaching is a very significant factor in the very good progress that pupils make. Teaching has improved significantly since the last report.

17. All teachers plan their lessons very effectively to take account of the varied needs of different groups of pupils, including the pupils with special educational needs and the few pupils for whom English is an additional language. The teaching of numeracy is generally good across the school and as a result it is rare for pupils to have problems with numeracy that affect their ability to achieve well in the subjects they study. Literacy is taught well in English. In many other subjects, teachers show a growing awareness of the need to reinforce and develop literacy skills, including the teaching of subject specific vocabulary. However, pupils' levels of literacy would be enhanced if the good

work being done in English and several other subjects to develop pupils' writing skills were reinforced consistently across the rest of the curriculum.

18. There is excellent teaching in 15 per cent of lessons. It is characterised by very good subject knowledge that allows the teacher to take the pupils forward in their learning, extending and challenging their knowledge and understanding. This is combined with excellent lesson planning, so that the pupils are building on what they have already learned and they are helped by the structure of the lesson to achieve well and so learn well. They take part in the lesson rather than sit and listen. Where teaching is excellent in the school, teachers are using a wide variety of teaching methods. These are appropriate to the lessons' aims and help to keep the pupils actively interested and involved. For example, in an excellent lesson in history taught to Year 8, the teacher had very high expectations of the pupils, insisting that they could and would answer very challenging questions about the spread of cholera. They had to achieve this in role as doctors, using a range of demanding source materials. They responded very well, trying very hard to justify their teacher's belief in them. This rigorous and demanding lesson was lightened by appropriate use of humour. Humour also featured in an excellent English lesson on ghost stories, also taught to a Year 8 class. Excellent relationships, excellent subject knowledge, but most of all challenge and high expectations within a demanding but just attainable time scale, led to pupils making excellent progress and coming to a very good understanding of the points the teacher was making.

19. There are many examples of very good teaching. Almost 46 per cent of teaching is very good - a high proportion. Such lessons feature very good relationships and management of pupils so that no time is wasted and they respond very well to the work the teacher sets. Good teaching was seen in just under 38 per cent of lessons. The school has worked hard on developing an effective teaching style across all subjects and the amount of good and very good teaching is proof that this has been effective. The principles of good practice that the school has identified and shared are evident in all lessons that feature good teaching. Lesson aims are shared with pupils at the beginning of every session so that pupils know exactly what they have to do and what is expected of them. They are regularly reminded of how much time they have to complete the tasks that have been set to keep them on task and working hard. The lesson aims are appropriate and the work is matched well to the needs and abilities of the pupils in the class. Relationships are good and discipline is strong, so that pupils are willing to work and are not distracted. In a Year 9 physical education lesson, for example, the teacher gave the pupils, all girls, very good opportunities for creative, independent group work. Although working in small groups without direct teacher involvement, no time was wasted by any pupil. All concentrated hard throughout the lesson and as a result made considerable progress. They collaborated very well and watched and learnt from each other. This was good teaching that would have been even better if the teaching had been focused even more sharply on improving the pupils' gymnastic skills.

The leadership and management focus very successfully on the raising of attainment. The school has received awards for outstanding improvement, in recognition of it being one of the most improved schools in the country.

20. The leadership and management of the school by the headteacher, ably supported by the deputy head and the senior and middle managers, are excellent. The governing body fulfils its responsibilities very well. All members of staff, and especially the senior team and heads of subject,

monitor the school's performance very well indeed, and this is an area of considerable strength. As a result of this analysis, very effective action is taken to improve the work of the school. This has led to particularly good progress since the time of the last report and the school is very well placed to improve in future. Resources are deployed well to improve the quality of education for the benefit of pupils and the school succeeds in getting the best value from its use of its funds and resources. Levels of staffing are good. The teaching staff is of high quality and the learning support assistants are very well deployed and are particularly effective in supporting pupils' learning.

21. The headteacher, along with the other senior managers, provides very clear direction for the work of the school. He has provided a clear vision, shared with the entire teaching staff, the governors and parents. The vision document, *School of the Future*, sets out expectations of a *vigorous and humane learning community, in which high achievement and creativity are the expectation and the norm*. The vision is of a learning community, where everyone learns, for the benefit of all. Many of the concepts outlined in the document are already evident in the school development plan, much of which is focused on the development of all who work in the school. Current professional development, for example, for teachers and teaching assistants includes work on the further development of teaching styles, use of assessment information and the identification and sharing of good and successful practice in order to improve even further the attainment and progress of pupils. There are high expectations of both teachers and pupils. There is a strong focus on the further improvement of the already high examination results, while not losing sight of the importance of other aspects of school life, such as pupils' personal development. The school's priorities for development are very appropriate and include a focus on raising the attainment of boys. The action taken to meet these targets has been very effective and the results of tests and examinations in 2000 show an improvement in attainment by boys from the levels gained by the 1999 cohort. The improvement in their performance in the national tests at the end of Year 9 indicates a slight improvement. However, the attainment of boys in the GCSE examinations was significantly better in 2000 than in 1999. This concern for development includes a high level of concern for social inclusion. In other words the school is committed to improving the quality of education for all pupils, irrespective of their background, gender, ethnic origin or level of need.

22. The key to the success of the school is the way in which the overarching aim, of creating a highly successful learning community, is promoted by senior managers equally effectively on many different, but related, fronts:

- * Setting high but attainable targets for pupils and for teachers, based on evidence of pupils' performance in previous test and related examination results, focuses the minds of all on the importance of academic success.
- * Teachers and support staff promote a culture in which to do well at school is something to be proud of and to aim for. This helps to create the very positive attitudes to teaching and learning that are so prevalent. The pupils look to the teachers and others to help them to learn and attain their targets. The teachers have become skilled in providing the help and individual support the pupils need, rooted in good quality data on what pupils have already attained and very good knowledge of examination syllabuses and National Curriculum levels.
- * The senior management team monitors and reviews the work of departments and teachers particularly effectively and uses the outcomes in a very positive and helpful way to support teachers in their work. The school was granted the Investors in People award for the second

- time in September 2000 because of its commitment to staff support and development and in November 2000 won the North Hertfordshire Business Award for Training and Development.
- * This commitment to staff development supports a reflective and self-evaluative culture that has helped to ensure high standards of management. The school is so committed to the principles of performance management that it applied the principles before it was statutorily required to do so. The school's strategies for appraisal and performance management are very good indeed.
 - * As a result, some of the best teaching observed on the inspection was from teachers relatively new to the profession, who had taught only at The Nobel School and owed much of their skill to the guidance they had received during their time there.

23. The process of management is very effective. It is open and consultative and leads to a very strong, shared commitment to improvement and capacity to succeed. All major decisions, including the setting of the school improvement plan, are done through a widespread and open process of consultation. Governors are fully involved in helping to shape the direction of the school. Parents are consulted regularly and their views taken into account. Almost all parents believe that the school welcomes them and responds very well to their views and concerns. This high level of involvement leads to a shared understanding of the policies and the aspirations of the school. As a result, the aims and values of the school are reflected very well in all of its work. Because of the open and communicative systems of management and decision-making, there is a consistent approach throughout the school to ensuring that all behave courteously, take responsibility for their learning and value the educational opportunities that the school provides.

24. All those with delegated responsibilities, for a subject or for pupils' welfare, carry out their roles very effectively. The provision for pupils with special educational needs (SEN) is well co-ordinated. The SEN co-ordinator ensures that teachers follow the correct procedures and provides good support to pupils, parents and staff. Statutory requirements are fully met. There is a named governor, who has oversight of all pupils with special educational needs. Specific grants are used well to support the education of pupils with SEN and additional funds are made available by the school, resulting in a good level of resourcing, overall.

25. The governing body carries out its responsibilities very well. It is very well organised and many of its members are highly qualified in their own professions. They bring very good management experience to their roles as governors. They are well informed, thorough in their monitoring of many aspects of the work of the school, including the budget, and have a good overview of the school's strengths and weaknesses. They are aware that the statutory requirement for an act of collective worship for all every day is not being met. Particularly effective is the Duty Governor of the Month initiative. Each month a named governor becomes the first point of contact between the school and the governing body and visits lessons to observe the teaching at first hand. This rolling programme of close involvement in the working of the school is, over time, developing the governors' knowledge and understanding of the school and its work.

As the school has recognised, boys make good progress during their time in the school, but girls make very good progress. A working party has been set up to find further ways to enhance boys' learning and this work needs to continue. A key focus is on the raising of boys' levels of literacy.

26. All pupils at the school, including those with special educational needs and the very few for whom English is an additional language, achieve well. However, there are differences between the attainment of boys and that of girls. Taking the last four years' results in the National Curriculum tests for 14 year olds, both boys and girls performed well, compared with boys' and girls' results across the country as a whole. However, in the English and mathematics tests, girls have been ahead of boys, with a difference that is significantly greater than that nationally. In the 2000 tests, girls did much better than girls nationally in English, being almost a year ahead, whereas boys were close to boys nationally, based on average point score. Both boys and girls attained more highly than their peers across the country in mathematics, but again girls were further ahead of their peer group than boys were of theirs. Boys and girls did almost equally well in science and were both almost a year ahead of the cohort nationally.

27. Overall, girls have performed better than boys in GCSE examinations over the past four years. The average point score for boys is just over three points above the average nationally, 38.8 as against 35.3. The average point score for girls is just over five points above the national average, 45.5 as against 40.4 nationally. The difference narrowed last year, however. In 2000, boys and girls performed almost equally well when compared with their peers nationally. The girls were almost five points above the average for girls and the boys four and a half points above the national average for boys. In 1999, the difference was much greater, in favour of girls. Projections show that the cohort on entry is changing and that the school will have more boys than girls in 2001. It is important that the tendency for boys to make less progress than girls is reversed, if the school's very good examination performance is to be sustained.

28. A key to this is the further development of boys' literacy skills. Overall, attainment in literacy and numeracy is above average. GCSE examination results in 2000 support this. In English, all pupils gained a pass mark and the proportion passing at the higher grades, A* - C, was 12 per cent above the national figure. In mathematics, 98.7 per cent of pupils entered passed the examination and 16 per cent more than nationally gained a grade in the A* - C range. However, there is a difference in performance between boys and girls. In both subjects, girls attained better than boys and the difference was greater than that nationally. A third of the boys only attained grades of D or E in the GCSE English examination. A further 10 per cent gained grades F or G. Girls performed much better. All but a fifth of girls attained the higher level grades A* - C in English. Much good work has been done, but there is still a need to develop further the teaching of literacy across the curriculum in order to raise boys' attainment further in all areas where literacy skills (and especially the skill to be able to communicate effectively in writing) affect performance, such as the arts, languages and humanities.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

29. This is a very successful school. In order to continue to improve and to raise levels of attainment even further, the governors, headteacher and teaching staff, with the support of the local education authority, should:

- Further improve the progress boys make. In order to do this, they need to:
 - * evaluate the successful strategies used by those departments that attain a relatively high proportion of A* - C passes in GCSE examinations for boys and adapt them in other subject areas to raise the attainment and motivation of boys so that it is more consistently high across the school;
 - * further implement the literacy policy to raise the literacy levels of boys across all subjects from the time they enter the school, in order to give them the skills they need to communicate successfully, in and out of school, especially in writing.

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed	81
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students	38

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
15	46	38	1	0	0	0

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

Information about the school's students

Students on the school's roll

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of students on the school's roll	873	198
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	68	0

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth Form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	8	1
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	191	0

English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	2

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	6
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	10

Attendance

Authorised absence

	%
School data	6.6
National comparative data	7.66

Unauthorised absence

	%
School data	0.1
National comparative data	1.08

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

Attainment at the end of Year 9

Number of registered students in final year of Year 9 for the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	80	84	164

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	49	66	60
	Girls	74	69	56
	Total	123	135	116
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	75 (74)	82 (71)	71 (66)
	National	63 (63)	65 (62)	59 (55)
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	36 (32)	52 (44)	32(37)
	National	28 (28)	42 (38)	30 (23)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC Level 5 and above	Boys	57	68	51
	Girls	71	72	57
	Total	128	140	108
Percentage of students at NC Level 5 or above	School	78 (76)	85 (71)	66 (70)
	National	64 (64)	66 (64)	62 (60)
Percentage of students at NC Level 6 or above	School	35 (39)	53 (46)	38 (40)
	National	31 (31)	39 (37)	29 (28)

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

Attainment at the end of Year 11

Number of 15 year olds on roll in January of the latest reporting year:	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	78	90	168

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* - C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	50	77	77
	Girls	71	88	90
	Total	121	165	167
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	72 (63)	98 (99)	99 (99)
	National	47.4 (46.6)	90.6 (90.9)	95.6 (95.8)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score	School	43

per pupil	National	38.4
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Figures in brackets refer to the year before the latest reporting year.

Attainment in the Sixth Form

Number of students aged 16, 17 or 18 who were entered for GCE A/AS examinations in the latest reporting year	Year	Male	Female	Total
	2000	34	43	77

Average A/AS Level point score per candidate

For candidates entered for two or more A Levels or their equivalent

	Male	Female	All
School average point score	20.0	22.2	21.2
National average point score	17.7	18.6	18.2

For candidates entered for fewer than two A Levels or their equivalent

	Male	Female	All
School average point score	6.9	4.2	5.4
National average point score	2.6	2.9	2.7

Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	10
Black – African heritage	4
Black – other	3
Indian	14
Pakistani	5
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	2
White	825
Any other minority ethnic group	10

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	2	0
Black – African heritage	1	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	16	1
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:

Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	61.8
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.9

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Education support staff:

Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	15
Total aggregate hours worked per week	378

Deployment of teachers:

Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.4
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Average teaching group size:

Y7– Y13

Key Stage 3	26.8
Key Stage 4	21.4

Financial information

Financial year	1999-2000
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	£
Total income	2503107.00
Total expenditure	2512917.00
Expenditure per pupil	2424.00
Balance brought forward from previous year	181466.00
Balance carried forward to next year	171656.00

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	1071
Number of questionnaires returned	216

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	41	54	3	1	1
My child is making good progress in school.	50	47	1	0	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	42	51	2	0	4
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	29	56	11	2	1
The teaching is good.	36	61	1	1	1
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	31	53	14	2	0
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	54	41	3	1	1
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	71	28	0	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	27	56	12	1	5
The school is well led and managed.	50	45	1	0	3
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	44	52	2	0	3
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	35	50	4	0	11

THE SIXTH FORM

PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

There are 82 boys and 116 girls in the Sixth Form. At the time of the previous inspection, in 1996, 17 students had been entered for A Level GCE examinations. In 2000, 77 students were entered. The Sixth Form offers a broad range of courses. Students can take individual one- and two-year flexible programmes of study incorporating A and A/S Level courses together with Intermediate and Advanced Level GNVQ courses, for those seeking vocational qualifications. There is open access to the Sixth Form and the attainment of students on entry is above average overall. With the full co-operation and agreement of the school, an OFSTED pilot inspection of the Sixth Form provision was run simultaneously with the short inspection of the whole school.

Most students are white, although the Sixth Form has the advantage of including a number of students who represent the wider ethnic mix of this country. There is one student with a statement of special educational need.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is a very good Sixth Form, with several excellent aspects. Pupils achieve well. From above average attainment on entry, attainment in the GCE A and AS Level and Advanced Level GNVQ examinations was well above the national average in 2000. The quality of teaching is very good, overall, and pupils learn very well, developing very good research and independent learning skills. It is the combination of very good teaching and the excellent attitudes of the students to their work, enabling them to take full advantage of all that their teachers offer, that is the key to the success of the Sixth Form.

The Sixth Form is successful and cost effective. The leadership and management are very good, ensuring that the work of teachers and students is monitored effectively and that students are set appropriate, challenging targets. The Sixth Form gives good value for money.

WHAT THE SIXTH FORM DOES WELL

- Students achieve very well and attain standards well above average, overall, in GCE A and AS Level examinations and vocational courses.
- Students develop excellent attitudes to study. Their behaviour is very good and they work hard. These are significant factors in the academic progress they make.
- Teaching is very good overall, with much that is excellent.
- The leadership and management are very good and ensure that the students receive the high quality of support and guidance they need at this level.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

- Although attainment is high overall, not all Sixth Form courses are equally effective in bringing the best out of the students. The monitoring of teaching and learning needs to continue to focus on recognising the most successful practice and sharing it, so that the quality of teaching is equally high across all subjects.

HOW THE SIXTH FORM HAS IMPROVED SINCE ITS LAST INSPECTION

The school was last inspected in September 1996. At that time, the Sixth Form was small and little direct reference was made to it in the final report on the school. Since 1996, the Sixth Form has grown considerably in both popularity and numbers. Attainment overall has risen from below the national average to well above average. The range of courses available has increased, so that there is now a good range, covering both academic and vocational courses. The proportion of pupils going on to higher education has increased significantly. The new courses and syllabuses now available for Sixth Formers have been implemented well. There has been very good improvement since the previous inspection and, with the changes in organisation and management already planned, the Sixth Form is well placed to continue to improve.

STANDARDS

The attainment of students in the Sixth Form who were entered for two or more GCE A and AS Level courses, or the equivalent vocational courses, was well above the national average in 2000. It has been improving steadily over recent years. This success is partly the result of the good teaching and provision for general studies. Almost all students are entered for the general studies examination at advanced Level and the pass rate has been very high. This boosts the overall average point score for the school at this level, because the general examination is an additional subject, increasing the number of subjects taken in A and AS Level examinations to three or four for most candidates. Some subjects, such as sociology, consistently produce examination results well above the national average. Attainment across other Sixth Form courses is variable. However, students achieve very well overall. Almost 80 per cent of them in 2000 attained better grades than were predicted (from national progression rates based on their GCSE performance).

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Attitudes to the school	Excellent: all students have very positive attitudes to the school. They come to school to study, behaving excellently, working hard and listening carefully to the advice their teachers offer in order to raise their attainment. Relationships are excellent. Levels of attendance are good.
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TEACHING AND LEARNING

Lessons seen overall	Very good. All teaching was good, very good or excellent, with 8 per cent excellent, 61 per cent very good and 31 per cent good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and plan lessons very well, progressively building students' knowledge, skills and confidence.
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In the Sixth Form, students are developing good independent learning skills, including research skills. They are mature and responsible learners.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Good: the curriculum provides very good equality of access and opportunity to a broad and balanced range of GCE A and AS Level courses and vocational courses, matched well to learners' needs and local circumstances. The school does not provide adequate teaching of religious education to meet statutory requirements, however.
How well the school cares for its pupils	The educational and personal support and guidance for students is excellent. There are excellent procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress and the information from assessment is used very well indeed to guide and support individual students, all of whom have mentors and individual targets. The quality and accessibility of information and advice is very good, including very good provision of careers advice and guidance about further education. The procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are very good. Sixth Form tutors are particularly effective.

HOW WELL THE SIXTH FORM IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Management and leadership	The senior staff with responsibility for the Sixth Form carry out their roles very well indeed, providing, along with the governing body, very good guidance to teachers and students, arising from very thorough monitoring and evaluation of their work. Financial planning is excellent and there is a very good match of teachers to groups and courses. The school's aims are fully reflected in the planning and work of the Sixth Form – respect for all and a determination to attain excellence.

The adequacy of accommodation and learning resources is satisfactory. There are shortages of resources, information and communication technology equipment, in physics and design and technology that the school has budgeted to meet over time. The professional development of staff is very good and has contributed significantly to the high quality of the teaching. The Sixth Form gives very good value for money.

SIXTH FORM STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

The students in the Sixth Form are very pleased with the provision for them. They particularly value the quality of the advice and guidance they receive and believe that they are taught well and challenged to do their best. Almost all the students would advise others to join their Sixth Form and all enjoy being a member of it and the courses they are following. The vast majority think that they are provided with plenty of activities and responsibilities to help them to develop as mature and responsible people, although some feel that there are still ways that the school could treat them in an even more adult manner. One Sixth Former wrote: *The information on our progress is excellent and our targets are reviewed termly to help us succeed. Our form tutor is excellent...very approachable and understanding!*

PART B: COMMENTARY

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The Sixth Form's results and students' achievements

30. The attainment of students in the Sixth Form who were entered for two or more GCE A and AS Level courses or the equivalent vocational courses was well above the national in 2000. It has been improving steadily over recent years. This success is partly the result of the good teaching and provision for general studies. Almost all students are entered for the general studies examination at advanced level and the pass rate has been very high. This boosts the overall average point score for the school at this level, because the general studies examination is an additional subject, increasing the number of subjects taken in A and A/S Level examinations to three or four for most candidates.

31. All students achieve well in the Sixth Form, including those with special educational needs and those for whom English is an additional language. Standards of students' oral and written skills are generally good. In English, they can debate and discuss, helping them to a better understanding of the texts they are studying. In history, students write good and well argued essays. There are minimal entry qualifications for joining the Sixth Form, so not all taking A or AS courses, or their GNVQ equivalents, attained highly in their GCSE examinations at the end of Year 11. Overall, however, the attainment of candidates on entry to the Sixth Form is above average. Attainment is well above average, overall, by the end of Year 13.

32. In 2000, general studies was the most successful of all the courses run in the Sixth Form. In general studies, the average point score was 8.1 and almost three quarters of the candidates gained A or B grades – a very high proportion. There was similar success in history. The average point score of 8 was well above the national average and two thirds of the candidates gained A or B grades. Attainment across all other Sixth Form courses is more variable. Several, such as history and sociology, produce examination results well above the national average. Others, such as mathematics, where there have been staffing difficulties (now resolved), are below average. In two subjects, music and physics, with a low number of candidates, pupils gained an average point score below the national average. This reflected the high proportion of relatively low-attaining students who opted to take these subjects in 2000. These candidates reached their predicted grades and performed no better in their other A or AS Level courses than they did in music or physics.

33. The large majority of students who took their examinations in 2000 achieved well in their time in the Sixth Form. Analysis of their attainment compared with their predicted attainment, forecast from their GCSE examination performance, shows that they did better than would be expected nationally of students who attained similar GCSE grades. Only ten of the 77 candidates attained an average point score below their predicted score and most exceeded their predicted performance by a large margin; by an average 6.75 A Level points. Full details of the pass rates and point scores of the subjects inspected are included below, with each subject summary. Although girls did slightly better than boys at GCE A Level in 2000, the difference was less marked than in the GCSE examinations. The differences in attainment between subjects are due to differences in the calibre of the candidates and some differences in the effectiveness of teaching between subjects. Although

attainment is high overall, not all Sixth Form courses are equally effective in bringing the best out of the students. The monitoring of teaching and learning needs to continue to focus on recognising the most successful practice and sharing it, so that the quality of provision and, especially, of teaching is equally high across all subjects.

Attitudes and values

34. All pupils have very positive attitudes to the school. They come to school to study, take their work very seriously and value the school and the opportunities it offers to them. Their behaviour is excellent. They work hard and listen carefully to the advice their teachers offer in order to raise their attainment. Relationships are excellent. Levels of attendance are good and they are punctual to their lessons. As a result, they take full advantage of the teaching time that is available to them and this helps to ensure that they learn and make good progress. It is the combination of very good teaching and the excellent attitudes of the students to their work, enabling them to take full advantage of all that their teachers offer, that is the key to the success of the Sixth Form.

35. The students in the Sixth Form were asked, as part of the inspection process, to answer a questionnaire to test their views on the quality of the education they were receiving. The answers were very positive. They are very pleased with the provision. They particularly value the quality of the advice and guidance they receive and believe that they are taught well and challenged to do their best. Almost all the students would advise others to join their Sixth Form and all enjoy being a member of it and the courses they are following. The vast majority think that they are provided with plenty of activities and responsibilities to help them to develop as mature and responsible people, although some feel that there are ways that the school could treat them in an even more adult manner.

36. Their involvement with younger pupils in the school is particularly strong. They act as friends and guides to Year 7 pupils when they come into the school. They continue to mentor and support younger pupils as they move through the school and help with the reading programme to develop pupils' literacy skills. They respond well to opportunities to take responsibilities as senior students; by running clubs and teams, for example. Their personal development benefits considerably from these activities.

37. Students' attitudes to the subjects they study are very positive and there are many examples of the mature, sensible and reliable ways that they take responsibility for their learning. In English, for example, all students demonstrate a high level of application, strong staying power and the ability to work under pressure. Their work is well organised and the large quantity of research notes, summaries and reviews of texts in all students' files shows good independent learning and good progress in developing critical skills. In mathematics, students contribute answers freely during class discussions. When written work is set, students always start immediately and apply themselves well to their tasks. Concentration is at a very high level. In their statistics coursework, students are given the freedom to work on their own projects. They devise their own investigations and use the Internet very sensibly for research purposes.

Teaching

38. The quality of teaching is high and this is a very significant reason why the Sixth Form is so successful at this school. Overall, teaching is very good. All teaching is good, very good or excellent, with 8 per cent of it excellent, 61 per cent very good and 31 per cent good. Teachers have excellent subject knowledge and plan lessons very well, building progressively students' knowledge, skills and confidence. All lessons have clear learning objectives, shared with the students so that they know what is expected of them. These expectations are almost always high. Students are challenged and expected to make significant gains in learning during every lesson. They trust their teachers, knowing that these expectations are realistic and that their teachers will structure the work and offer the support and guidance that each individual needs in order to ensure success. The pace of learning is a feature of almost every lesson. Teaching is brisk and considerable amounts are covered in each session. Students are regularly reminded of how much time is left and what they still have to cover. The result is that no time is wasted, their learning is extended rapidly and standards are therefore high.

39. All teachers are enthusiastic about the subjects they are teaching and they plan interesting lessons so that this enthusiasm motivates and interests their students. This increases their commitment, ensures their concentration and encourages them to work hard. An excellent example of this was seen in an A Level biology lesson. The students were involved in an investigation into the kinds of bacteria that exist on our fingers. The teacher's own interest and enthusiasm for this research inspired the students, who planned their own investigations to a high standard. Excellent teaching led to learning that was exceptionally good. The students fully understood the concepts they were being taught, were able to use them in their own research and both prepared and presented their investigation and written work very well indeed.

40. All teachers are skilled at using questioning techniques to test students understanding, in order to assess how well they are doing and how much they have learnt. Further, they use leading questions to challenge and extend students, forcing them to think and work things out for themselves. Students rise to these challenges well and this contributes significantly to the progress they make. Teachers do not spoon-feed their students. They insist that they find things out for themselves, where appropriate. This means that, in the Sixth Form, pupils are developing good independent learning skills, including research skills, and are mature and responsible learners.

41. A particularly strong feature of teaching is the emphasis teachers place on using assessment to set challenging targets for students to achieve. The student review system provides excellent guidance for students and parents. In individual lessons, however, teachers use assessment information to make clear to students what their targets are and what they must do to reach the levels expected of them. In their lesson planning, however, it is very rare at Sixth Form level for a range of tasks to be set to cater for individual needs. The same task is usually set for all. There are times when setting tasks of different levels of challenge and difficulty would help to support or challenge students further.

42. Within a strong overall picture, there are relative strengths and weaknesses. In some subjects, such as English, teaching is almost always very good or excellent and students consistently achieve highly as a result. In mathematics, teaching is good overall. Teachers have very high

expectations of what students should be able to achieve and strive to push forward the pace of lessons. However, the level of challenge is not always high enough for each individual in the class. It is important, if standards in the Sixth Form are to rise even higher, that the school continues to identify and share the best and most effective teaching strategies, so that teaching in all subjects is as good as it is in the best.

How good are the curricular and other opportunities offered to students?

43. The Sixth Form curriculum is dedicated primarily to academic studies and the advanced and intermediate vocational courses. Students are expected to have an appropriate academic record in the GCSE examinations and be highly motivated to succeed and take responsibility for their own learning. The curriculum meets the needs of students. The school looks into the needs of students through consultation meetings with students and their parents. The governors make valuable contributions to the debate, making good use of their industrial experience and their knowledge of the relative value placed on different types of vocational qualifications.

44. The school gives a high priority to preparing pupils for the Sixth Form. Very good attention is given to the transition period - through the Sixth Form day, taster lessons for Year 11 students and interviews with a member of the senior management team and their parents. The Year 12 students, whilst describing the move from Year 11 to the Sixth Form as a big step, appreciated the support they were given when they began this level of academic work.

45. The majority of Year 11 students choose to continue their studies into the Sixth Form and the school, in response to their needs, has introduced a number of new courses over the last two years. Sports studies, theatre studies and general studies, as well as information and communications technology, are examples of these. The curriculum is designed, and regularly reviewed, to reflect students' immediate needs and future career plans. The school is continuing to broaden the courses and will, in the next academic year, be offering advanced level psychology. At present, the only intermediate GNVQ course currently available in Year 12 is in business studies, because there was insufficient demand for health and social care. The school welcomes students from other schools. The school has established good, working links with local schools to broaden their provision of intermediate course programmes.

46. In the Sixth Form, narrow specialisation is avoided by the provision of a substantial programme of complementary courses. This includes general studies, personal, social and health education, games as an optional course, the Royal Society of Arts information and communication technology course and the key skills programme, to which all departments contribute. Students receive a wide range of curricular opportunities and good advice when choosing their subjects.

47. There is a positive response to implementing the new Key Skills Qualification to encourage Post 16 students to develop their Key Skills. The school, supported by the Further Education Development Agency (FEDA), has taken a leading role in the local education authority to provide in-service training for its own staff and those from link establishments. The skills, which are an integral part of the GNVQ courses, are integrated into the whole

curriculum. The school has been very proactive in mapping out each student's acquisition of the skills in order to identify areas that need to be reinforced. Members of staff from this school co-ordinate and manage the new Key Skills qualification for the surrounding area.

48. Departments have written and developed new course outlines, schemes of work and resources to reflect the new course requirements. The school gives students a good overview of the kinds of career opportunities different subjects will open to them. Students develop very good independent learning skills, reflecting a primary aim of study in the Sixth Form. They are encouraged to undertake private study and have access to extensive resources, such as laptop computers, the Internet and intranet and the school library. The school monitors students' progress and their use of these facilities. In response, students work effectively and maintain a high level of trust in using their study time constructively. The school undertakes intensive monitoring of achievements and destinations of students by gender and ethnicity.

49. Very good and relevant careers guidance is given and students taking the GNVQ courses are given ample opportunities to pursue work-related experience as part of their study. For example, GNVQ business studies integrates a residential trip investigating European business into the course and, in the health study course, work experience is organised at a playgroup, nursery, or elderly persons' residential home. Similarly, in French and German, a one-week work experience abroad is offered.

Spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

50. The Sixth Form provides ample opportunities for students to develop as individuals by taking on responsibilities. The provision for their moral, social and cultural development is very good. Spiritual experiences are derived from year assemblies and in the celebration of those students and members of staff whose fleeting lives are remembered in creative poems, memorial services and mementoes. Students are also invited to record their experience of awe and wonder and many share their experiences in the school documentary log on students' personal development. Although there are arrangements for spiritual development, all students do not get the opportunity to follow a discrete religious education programme in sufficient depth to meet the requirements of the locally Agreed Syllabus.

51. There is a wide range of opportunities for students to increase their moral development. For example, in 2000, Year 12 and 13 students took part in an in-depth study-morning on refugees living in Britain by engaging in role-play and discussion to explore and understand the difficulties they face as 'outsiders'. During the inspection, they were given the opportunity, in assembly and in subsequent work with a visiting speaker, to consider the implications of living under apartheid. The house system is named after Nobel laureates and the students learn of the work, of international importance, that these exceptional men and women have done to benefit mankind. In 2000, students were given the chance to engage in discussion with one such laureate, Amartya Sen. The school has a very strong tradition of the Sixth Form students being addressed by visiting speakers from around the world, the local community and wider afield. On these occasions, students' moral awareness of right and wrong and justice is increased. This school is thought to be the only one in the world given permission by the Nobel foundation to use their name as its title.

52. The opportunities for social development are also very good. These are found in the students' work with the young pupils in Years 7 to 9. They help with lower school teams and clubs and in the *Helpliners* programme they give advice and support with studies. Students also work as trained mentors and form assistants in Year 7 forms and take part in the literacy initiative. They contribute to working parties covering aspects of Sixth Form life and pursue a range of recreational activities in the school and local community.

53. Cultural development is also very good through the links the school maintains with local, national and international organisations and countries such as Africa and Israel. Cultural development is also nurtured by the arts. There is a rich and varied range of extra curricular activities provided across the curriculum. The attention given to the multicultural character of the United Kingdom is very good.

Support and guidance

54. The school provides highly effective guidance and support to Sixth Form students from induction until they leave the school. When they enter the Sixth Form, students are closely supervised for the first half term, until their teachers feel that they are able to cope with the additional freedom associated with education at this level. At this point, they are allowed home study time and, as time progresses, increased opportunities for independence.

55. The older students play a significant part in the induction process, discussing with future students the similarities and differences between the lower school and the Sixth Form. This opportunity to speak with and question current Sixth Formers helps potential students understand future expectations. This support and communication continues after induction, when new students are supported both by personal tutors and fellow Sixth Formers.

56. Sixth Form students also give a large amount of successful support to others. For example older students discuss with younger students how they felt about their initial visits to universities. In lessons, students are supportive of each other as they develop their critical skills by appraising the work of other students. They frequently feed back their opinions on presentations in class and will diplomatically suggest areas for development, for example, where arguments are not supported by sufficient evidence. Sixth Form students also support the youngest pupils in the school by contributing to their work on personal development. During the inspection they talked through a series of moral dilemmas. This gave the Sixth Form students good experience of working with younger children and helped the latter to develop their responses to right and wrong.

57. The responsibility that the school gives to the students significantly promotes their skills, their self-esteem and their confidence. The school trusts them to mount theatrical presentations or musical reviews of their own, with staff simply overseeing health and safety requirements or responding to requests for help. This wide range of very effective support for and by the students has significantly increased since the last inspection, when too few opportunities for students to take responsibility were seen.

58. Tutors are committed to providing the maximum levels of support and guidance so that students are content, can concentrate on their learning and achieve their very best. To achieve these high standards, they make very good use of regular tutorial sessions, which are highly valued by the students as a means of sharing their thoughts and opinions. Members of staff also give generously of their time to provide informal opportunities for students to discuss matters of immediate concern or interest over coffee. The formal arrangements for examination preparation and application to university or college are highly efficient. The school also makes very good use of its relationships with other post-16 providers and local businesses to inform pupils of the qualifications needed for careers in local finance companies or modern apprenticeships. The major strength of the support, however, is the informal, ad hoc information, advice and discussion between tutors and students. Learning support for students with any kind of learning need continues into the Sixth Form at a high standard, with skilled and knowledgeable teaching assistants. Students may also continue to meet with a counsellor. All members of staff are rigorous in ensuring that they investigate all possible means of support. They seek advice from medical agencies, look for extra equipment for pupils who may need help, for example, with note taking, and are rigorous in ensuring that pupils receive necessary examinations concessions to cater for their special needs.

59. The excellent personal guidance and support provided by the school is a direct result of the very strong relationships between staff and students and results in a school that promotes and values each student's achievements.

Assessment

60. Overall, the procedures for assessing students' attainment and progress are excellent and the school is continuously developing and refining them. The school has a comprehensive database on individual students based on results of national tests at the end of Years 6 and 9 and GCSE results. Performance is also analysed using externally produced formulae and county information to predict attainment grades in the Sixth Form. Students are monitored by gender and ethnicity. The school organises regular, systematic and high quality reviews of students' progress.

61. The school has a Sixth Form monitoring and review system that assists each student to attain the highest grades of which they are capable. They receive regular advice and guidance from subject teachers and have interviews with their form teachers once a term, when general learning targets and specific actions are set. The assistant Sixth Form directors read all subject and form teacher reviews and have personal interviews with students who have areas of concern. A copy of the review with the targets goes home for parents to see and comment. Students feel well informed and motivated by this process.

62. Marking in all subjects is developmental and informative. Students feel that in biology and sociology their work is particularly well marked. Good attention is given to technical skills as well as the content, as was seen in the marking of critical appreciation, for example, in English. Many subjects are developing portfolios of assessed work and use these exemplars to help students to see what is expected of them.

Leadership and Management

63. The staff with responsibility for the Sixth Form carry out their roles very well indeed, providing, along with the governing body, very good guidance to teachers and students arising from very thorough monitoring and evaluation of their work. The schools aims are fully reflected in the planning and work of the Sixth Form – respect for all and a determination to attain excellence. There are two joint leaders of the Sixth Form, whose work is supported by the assistant deputy headteacher. They have complementary skills and delegate the management tasks to each other, according to individual areas of expertise and interest. The level of co-operation between them is high. They work together well in the strategic planning of Sixth Form development and in the rigorous monitoring and evaluation of Sixth Form teaching and courses. All are involved in mentoring students and the high quality of this, based on the *Student Review* system of target setting and tracking of pupils' progress, is a considerable strength in the provision for Sixth Formers. It goes some way towards explaining the good overall levels of achievement, as well as the confidence that Sixth Formers have in the advice and support that they are getting at the school.

64. Students, too, have management responsibilities, as assistants to form tutors and as organisers of events such as the annual cabaret and fund raising for charity. They carry these responsibilities very well and their personal development benefits, as does the school, from the calm and responsible ways in which they lead and manage other pupils.

65. Financial planning is excellent. Costs in the Sixth Form are extremely carefully balanced with those of the rest of the school. The headteacher takes a particular interest in balancing the respective costs of all areas of the school across the three key stages and his organisation of this aspect is to be highly commended. The school clearly justifies the expenditure allocated to the Sixth Form and there is an absolute match between the Sixth Form expenditure and that for the main school. The headteacher analyses the income for each year group in the school, and calculates a rounded value per unit. He then matches the income for each key stage to the teacher periods allocated. An excellent balance is obtained between the income for the Sixth Form and the expenditure. Moreover, it is clear that these calculations are performed before the curriculum is agreed and before the staffing for the Sixth Form is allocated. Further analyses, which match pupil periods allocated with age weighted pupil units income, take place. When the spreadsheet calculation to assess the proportion of income that the school receives for the Sixth Form and the proportion of its resources that are devoted to the Sixth Form is undertaken, the income and expenditure are extremely closely balanced. The headteacher also analyses the annual costs of each subject offered in the Sixth Form with the number of students who take the courses. The direct teaching costs are calculated for each A Level and each other course, and these lead to calculations of the cost per pupil of each course. These statistics can then be used for management purposes. The use and monitoring of the budget for the Sixth Form is extremely well controlled. The Sixth Form gives very good value for money.

66. Staffing is good overall with appropriately qualified teachers in all subject areas. There is a good balance of age and experience, for example, in history and also in science, where there is a good range of specialisms. When new teachers are being appointed, the interview panel takes into account the candidates' ability to teach to GCE Advanced Level. Provision for the induction of staff new to the school is excellent. The school has good accommodation, with an appropriate

range of specialist facilities. Learning resources are good overall, and they are used well, though resources for information technology are unsatisfactory in science. The quality of items such as furniture and furnishings is good. The school is well maintained by the Premises Team and kept clean and tidy by the contract cleaners, some of whom are also Sixth Formers at the school. The administrative support from the office staff is particularly skilful, efficient and effective.

KEY ISSUES

67. There are no key issues for the further improvement of the Sixth Form provision at the school. This is a very successful Sixth Form. There is, however, a minor issue that the inspection team brings to the attention of the governors and that they may wish to include in their development plan. This is the need to:

- further improve the teaching in those subjects that, over time, have not been as consistently successful as others in gaining good examination results by:
 - * continuing to monitor and evaluate teaching strategies used by Sixth Form teachers and share the best practice;
 - * ensuring that teachers, in their planning, provide a range of tasks that will meet the varied and individual needs of the students, in order to help each one to make the best possible progress.

THE SUBJECTS OF THE CURRICULUM INSPECTED IN THE SIXTH FORM

ENGLISH

The school's examination results for 2000

	Entry	% A - B	%A - E	Average point score
Boys	8	12.5 (36.4)	100 (93.9)	5 (5.8)
Girls	19	15.8 (35.5)	89.5 (95.5)	4.5 (5.8)
Total	27	14.8 (35.8)	92.6 (95.1)	4.7 (5.8)

The scores in brackets are the national figures for comparison.

ENGLISH

68. Standards in GCE A Level literature are currently in line with the national averages. In 2000, the numbers achieving the higher grades, A and B were lower than expected and dipped below the national average. This was a complete contrast to the previous two years and, in particular, 1999, when the proportions achieving the higher grades were well above the national average. Over the past few years, almost all students taking the examination gained at least a pass grade. Overall, most students make good progress based on the predictions made from their performance in the GCSE examinations. Standards of work seen in lessons confirm that the present Year 12 and 13 students are on target to exceed their minimum grade.

69. Attainments in speaking and listening are very good. The students are articulate and make concise pronouncements when explaining their views, asking questions and working collaboratively to discuss their work. Talk is used purposefully to enhance their learning. Students read with insight and display highly developed critical skills when discussing literary texts. By Year 13, their analytical responses show good engagement with a writer's technique and purpose. They give well-informed personal responses in their interpretation and analyses of the use of language and its effect on the reader. This was clearly illustrated in their analysis of Hare's *Murmuring Judges* when they maintained a sharp focus on the author's technique and purpose. Here, however, there is room for students to develop their vocabulary further to enable them to tease out the ideas in a text and express their views clearly.

70. Orally, students explore ideas confidently, but they do not always sustain an in-depth analysis when giving a written response. In Year 12, students read widely and carry out extensive research and investigation notes to enrich their understanding of literary texts. Writing skills have improved since the last inspection, when it was judged that their written work was lacking in structure. Students make good progress in extended, critical writing, working from impressively detailed plans to structure their essays. Discursive essays are generally well handled and good use is made of research notes to develop their arguments. Attainments in writing are, however, affected by minor grammatical flaws and incorrect spellings, because students do not proof read and edit their work rigorously enough.

71. Students' attitudes to the subject are positive and they are able to undertake research and work independently. They demonstrate a high level of application, strong staying power and the ability to work under pressure. Their work is well organised and the large volume of research notes, summaries and reviews of texts show good independent learning and progress in developing critical skills. For example, they show a good understanding of the way in which literary texts are shaped by researching into the social, historical and political background of texts, such as Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Burgess's *A Clockwork Orange* and Blake's *Songs of Innocence*.

72. Teaching is very good, and occasionally excellent, with some strikingly good features. Teachers have high expectations and these are communicated explicitly to students throughout lessons. Planning is of a high quality and teachers use their understanding of students' needs to prepare lessons and pass on expertise and mastery of literary skills to their students. The breadth and depth of their knowledge is passed on though the factual information students are given to develop their analytical approach to texts. A particularly strong feature of teaching is the emphasis teachers place on using assessment to set challenging targets for students to achieve. The structured approaches to assessing analytical skills (through the use of writing templates, work stations and discussion and feed back under timed conditions) are effective in helping students to achieve their targets, because specific critical skills of analysing, interpreting and giving a personal response are drummed into them. Teachers use every available opportunity to develop students' communication skills, so that their vocabulary is extended. Close attention is given to question and answer sessions and the plenary to ensure that students are making progress.

73. The leadership and management of the department are outstanding. There is a strong commitment to improving standards and an increasing awareness of the shortcomings and what is required in order to improve results. The detailed analysis of examination results and the collaborative work testify to the department's intention to developing students' expertise and examination results. The department is responding positively to implementing the new GCE AS and A Level courses.

MATHEMATICS

THE SCHOOL'S EXAMINATION RESULTS FOR 2000

	Entry	% A - B	%A - E	Average point score
Boys	8	12.5 (43.0)	75 (86.6)	3.5 (5.8)
Girls	9	22.2 (44.9)	77.8 (89.4)	3.6 (6.0)
Total	17	17.6 (43.7)	76.5 (87.6)	3.5 (5.9)

The scores in brackets are the national figures for comparison.

74. Levels of attainment in mathematics at A Level last year were significantly below the national averages. They were lower than the previous year, with boys and girls performing at about the same level. One of the reasons for these results was the number of changes of staff during the previous academic year, when the department was without a head of department of mathematics for the spring term. The number of students now opting for mathematics is growing and, with the

increasing levels of attainment in GCSE examinations, expectations of an improvement in results are high.

75. In lessons, the overall quality of students' work is average and boys and girls perform at the same levels. Learning in lessons is good, with students showing high levels of concentration. In a lesson on the Remainder Theorem, students listened extremely carefully to the teacher for a long period of time, interjecting questions for clarification and suggesting answers that showed good gains in the acquisition of new ideas. Analysis of students' work shows good progress over time. The department is beginning to make good use of the analysis of students' grades and this can usefully be extended to build up more accurate student profiles.

76. The quality of teaching is good. Teachers' knowledge and understanding of the subject and of the requirements of the new syllabuses are very good. Teachers plan in detail, with lesson plans showing clear progression through the lesson. Time constraints for each part of the lesson are given and objectives for learning in the lesson are communicated to students. Teachers' explanations break questions into appropriate steps and sometimes include the marks that would be awarded for each part of a question, as in the detailed analysis of the solution of a quadratic equation. Teachers have very high expectations of what students should be able to achieve and strive to push forward the pace of lessons. Occasionally, more pressure can be applied to increase the pace of learning. The management of students is very good, leading to mature attitudes to learning. Homework is set regularly; usually the completion of work started in class.

77. Students make very good efforts in class. They are committed to learning and show very mature study skills. Students always listen carefully to their teachers and are encouraged to ask questions at any stage during the explanation of the work. Students contribute answers freely during class discussions. When written work is set, students always start immediately and apply themselves well to their tasks. Concentration is at a very high level. In their statistics assessed coursework, students are given the freedom to work on their own projects. They devise their own investigations and use the Internet very sensibly for research purposes. Students know their approximate expected grades, but are not always sure what they must do to improve particular areas of their learning in mathematics.

78. Assessment procedures are well organised. The quality of everyday marking is variable, however, and comparisons between the progress of parallel groups could usefully be made. One group is sometimes ahead of the other and sharing of information and teaching strategies would help to improve the progress they make.

79. There is a very good match of staffing for the teaching of A Levels. Accommodation, while not specifically designed for Sixth Form students, is excellent, with all rooms showing very high quality displays of students' work. Monitoring and evaluation of the work of the department has started and this can be extended to increase the attainment levels in the Sixth Form courses.

BIOLOGY

THE SCHOOL'S EXAMINATION RESULTS FOR 2000

	Entry	% A - B	%A - E	Average point score
Boys	6	16.7 (28.1)	100 (84.5)	4.7 (4.8)
Girls	11	63.6 (35.5)	100 (88.5)	7.5 (5.4)
Total	17	47.1 (32.6)	100 (87)	6.4 (5.2)

The scores in brackets are the national figures for comparison.

80. The number of students choosing to study biology in the Sixth Form has increased significantly since the last inspection, from just one in 1997, ten in 1998, to 17 in 2000. The number of A2 candidates entered for 2001 is 22; and 38 are expected to take advanced supplementary biology in 2001. The latter are all potential Advanced Level candidates for A2 in 2002. During this period, performance in biology at advanced level has improved considerably, from well below the national average to above the national average. In 2000, as is shown by the chart above, the results were above the national average. When results in biology are compared with those gained by the same candidates in other subjects, they are, on average, better than in almost all other subject within the school. The performance of girls is significantly better than that of boys at the higher grades and the school is working to redress this imbalance. As a measure of added value, the school predicts Advanced Level grades using the results in a range of GCSE subjects and historical data for all maintained schools within the county. This comparison reveals that, of the 17 entries, the mean improvement in grade was 0.83 for boys and 0.54 for girls, indicating very good progress.

81. In lessons, achievement is outstanding, with a commitment to the highest standards shown by both teachers and students. Students' notes reveal a good range of factual information and a high level of understanding, shown by a feel for the language of the subject, by perceptive comments and by sharp analysis and evaluation. An important feature of the work relates to experimental design and students' work shows a really solid grasp of the concepts of the subject. This understanding supports their ability to write independently. For example, they can write about the differences between arteries, capillaries and veins in considerable detail, showing an excellent level of understanding of the relationships between the structure and histology of blood vessels, and their function. There is clear evidence of progress through the course. This reveals itself in developing sophistication of understanding, increasing application of number and linguistic skills and good use of technical terms. Pupils use their literacy, application of number and information and communication technology skills to present work of a high quality.

82. Teaching in biology is often excellent. The knowledge and skills of the four biologists in the department complement one another well, and courses are well planned. Teachers show an infectious enthusiasm for their subject, which results in pupils being fully engaged throughout lessons and the excellent relationships between pupils and staff support very good learning. Students are challenged to think critically about what they are studying and are encouraged to ask questions: teachers, for their part, continually adjust their teaching to give the best possible support to their students. An emphasis is rightly placed on practical work, in terms both of planning investigations and of developing the skills, such as drawing, necessary for students to implement their plans and to

present their work well. The many interesting discussions held in lessons help students to evaluate critically what they are being taught and to ask perceptive questions. A good system for assessing students' work and using the results to assist in lesson planning contributes greatly to the progress made by students in lessons. The above average examination results and increasing numbers of students choosing to study biology are a tribute to the high standards of teaching in the subject.

83. The subject is adequately resourced and is well managed to maximise the benefit to students and to give the best value for money. The work of the department is monitored very effectively and the outcomes used to share good practice and improve its work even further.

BUSINESS STUDIES AND ECONOMICS

84. The school teaches both business studies and economics in the Sixth Form. However, whereas business studies is taught in the faculty of vocational education, economics is in the faculty of humanities. This situation, already under review at the time of the inspection, militates against the best developmental interests of both subjects, whose affinity is clear. Nevertheless, these are good departments with many strong features.

BUSINESS STUDIES

85. In business studies, GNVQ intermediate and advanced levels are taught. The new, single and double Vocational A Levels are taught in Year 12 and the older Advanced GNVQ in Year 13. Results at GNVQ at the Advanced Level (in 2000, 18 per cent of candidates gained distinctions and further 53 per cent gained merits) are above the standards achieved in similar schools across the country.

ADVANCED LEVEL GNVQ

86. At the advanced Level of GNVQ, in classes seen and in students' written work, standards are above national norms. Students have good skills in information and communications technology (ICT) and have a good understanding of their use in business. Students are covering adequately the key skills, mainly by their study of ICT in discrete classes, but also by the successful integration of it within the other elements of the course. There are good examples in students' work of the use of ICT skills, as well as good levels of literacy and the application of number. Often all three areas come together in students' work. This is also a strong feature of the new Vocational A Level. The Year 12 Vocational A Level marketing assignments on baguettes are particularly good examples. Students are now developing the art of writing evaluations, though this continues to be the weakest of their skills. The standard of students' portfolios is good. Most are well organised, well structured and well presented.

87. Lessons are well prepared. In a lesson to Year 12 on the role of the government in the economy, the planning ensured that the students were set tasks that challenged them. The teacher explained the task in an interesting way that motivated the students. In response, they listened

attentively, settled quickly to work and concentrated throughout the lesson. Their attitudes are very positive and this was a feature of this particular lesson, in which a strength was the way the depth of commitment they showed to the course and the very good co-operation. Throughout the lesson, they students' answers to questions revealed that their analytical skills and levels of understanding were well above the average expected on the course. They were particularly adept at realising that the simple solution is not likely to succeed for a government seeking to balance both economic and political considerations.

INTERMEDIATE LEVEL GNVQ

88. At the intermediate level of GNVQ, where 88 per cent of students gained passes, attainment is above national norms. However, given the fact that the cohort of students is made up of students with relatively low levels of prior attainment, achievement both in lessons and in modules and projects is very good overall. However, some weaker students are struggling to maintain these standards. Students' progress is especially good where they are actively involved in a learning process that encourages them to explore themes and make decisions for themselves. Learning is good, particularly in the Intermediate GNVQ course. Learning, as measured by progress from prior attainment levels, is very good. Students show a good understanding of the concept of a business plan, for example, and understand how to draw one up, dividing the task very competently into its constituent parts. They use information and communication technology well in their studies, but the literacy skills of some students affect the quality and pace of their work.

89. Students' attitudes towards their work are good. They are generally attentive. They respond well to questions, remain on task, maintain concentration and take pride in their finished work.

90. Teaching at both levels is good, and sometimes it is very good. Teachers are secure in their knowledge of the subjects they teach and they plan their lessons effectively. They use time and other resources effectively and set clear targets. In the very good lessons, teachers spend less time talking to the class as a whole than they do in good lessons. They give more individual attention and are adept at intervening with additional supportive teaching points, whilst allowing and encouraging students to learn independently. In a good lesson on the resources needed for setting up a business, the teacher explained the task very well because of his good subject knowledge. The objectives of the lesson were explained very clearly to the students so that they understood exactly what was expected of them. The pace of learning was brisk, although the teacher spent slightly more time than was necessary talking to the class rather than letting them work.

91. The department has clear marking and assessment policies that are helpful to students and the assessment comments, as a result, give them useful advice on how to improve their work. Feedback from their teachers is extensive, focused and forms an effective basis for self-assessment by students, leading to new targets being set. Teachers use the assessment of students' work well to help in future planning and teaching. The department uses its own internal verification programme effectively.

92. Business education is efficiently and effectively managed by the head of department, whose style, which is one of quiet, but firm, support, has secured a department committed to high

achievement. Under his leadership, the department has produced informed and informative documentary evidence of good planning in all aspects of the work of the department. The qualifications and experience of the staff match the demands of the curriculum and the needs of the students. Furthermore, appropriate members of staff have the necessary additional assessor qualifications that enable them to act as internal assessors of the GNVQ aspects of the department's work.

93. The department has a suite of rooms. However, it lacks the resource of a designated business room to create an appropriate learning environment for the activities of the department. Resources in the department, in terms of textbooks, are good. The computers in the department are up to date, networked and have internet links. The department's links with industry are not strong, since they tend to be limited to service industries. However, links with industry in Belgium compensate for this weakness to some extent.

DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY

(Graphics communication A Level and Product Design AS Level)

THE SCHOOL'S EXAMINATION RESULTS FOR 2000

	Entry	% A - B	%A - E	Average point score
Boys	7	33.3 (27.5)	100 (90.40)	6 (5.2)
Girls	3	42.9 (33.1)	100 (94.1)	5.3 (5.7)
Total	10	40 (29.1)	100 (91.4)	5.8 (5.3)

The scores in brackets are the national figures for comparison.

94. Standards in A-level design and technology are good. Results are above average and have risen since the first entries, in 1999. Of the ten students entered, all passed and 40 per cent gained grade B, but there were no A grades. This is, in part, because the extent to which students can use information communications technology (ICT) in the control, design and manufacture of products is limited. This is confirmed by the standards of work seen during the inspection, which included some use of the digital camera and paint and drawing software, but no evidence of computer aided design or computer aided manufacture. This has already been identified by the school and funding set aside for the development of ICT resources.

95. Standards in AS Level product design are good. From the first piece of assessed course work the students are exceeding the expectations set for them and their results are above average.

96. Attainment in lessons is always at least satisfactory and often good. All students make advances in knowledge, understanding and skills during the courses. For example, in a Year 12 lesson, the students were analysing breathalysers for use by the police. Their understanding of design and manufacturing practice was well developed. They produced prototypes to evaluate with the police at the end of the assignment.

97. Students achieve well and make good progress in knowledge and understanding through Years 12 and 13. Students in Year 12 on the product design course have a good working understanding of materials as they prepare, process and manufacture their breathalyser prototypes. Students following the graphics communication course in Year 13 have a well-developed understanding of design processes and the importance of annotation and narration in communicating how the designs have developed. However, progress would benefit from the ICT resources soon to be adopted. This would particularly help, for example, with preparing patterns for prototypes and three dimensional presentation drawings of their garden designs.

98. Students enjoy their learning. They make good progress, staying focused for long periods of concentration, taking pride in producing good quality work to time targets. This is because the teaching is, in the majority of respects, very good and teachers' expectations of the students are excellent. Lessons are very well planned and organised. Each lesson has clear targets and interim assessments are used to maintain challenge and inform target setting. All students' progress is monitored against individual targets set with the teacher. There is a high level of individual support at all times for all student abilities and challenging questions are asked to test ideas and hypotheses.

99. Students rise well to the challenge and work hard exploring ideas, some quite innovative, enjoying creating new and unusual products. Teachers set very high standards for conduct and behaviour especially in Year 12 where positive attitudes to the subject are established. However, there is, on occasions, insufficient teaching of the skills of ICT and this affects students' learning of these skills, as well as their creative effort, productivity and pace of work.

100. The leadership and management of design and technology are satisfactory. The monitoring of students progress in lessons and through the course is a strength of the faculty but closer analysis of the examination results is needed. A and AS level provision is limited to graphics, equally accessible to boys and girls, some transfer very successfully to graphics from food technology for the Sixth Form. The faculty has realised the need to better match learners' aspirations and achievements in other aspects of design and technology through a broader range of material options in the Sixth Form.

ECONOMICS

THE SCHOOL'S EXAMINATION RESULTS FOR 2000

	Entry	% A - B	%A - E	Average point score
Boys	6	33.3 (35.0)	100 (87.2)	6.7 (5.3)
Girls	3	33.3 (33.9)	100 (89.4)	6.7 (5.3)
Total	9	33.3 (34.6)	100 (87.6)	6.7 (5.3)

The scores in brackets are the national figures for comparison.

101. Results in A Level economics, in 2000 are close to the national average. The 100 per cent A - E results are well above national averages. However, these figures hide the strengths of the department, since the results for the nine students who took the examinations last year are three at grade B and six at grade C. Two students were within five marks of achieving B. This shows the

potential strength of the subject in the curriculum. In classes seen, students generally have appropriate levels of skill and confidence when discussing concepts involved in

their work. For example, Year 12 students speak confidently about *aggregated demand*. Although good standards of work are produced at A Level, students would benefit from even more opportunities to develop analytical thinking related to the more abstract concepts of the subject.

102. Students' attitudes towards their work are good. They are generally attentive, they respond well to questions, they remain on task, maintain concentration and take pride in their finished work. However, some students are sometimes passive recipients of knowledge rather than active participants in their own learning.

103. Teaching is good, overall. It is never less than satisfactory and in 60 per cent of lessons teaching is good and in 20 per cent it is very good. Teaching is based on secure knowledge of the subject and on effective planning of lessons. Teaching time and other resources are used effectively and clear targets are set. In the best lessons, teaching is concentrated less on the teacher imparting knowledge and more on encouraging students to learn independently, but with sufficient intervention and additional support to ensure that no one is lagging behind. The teacher in charge of economics has produced clear marking and assessment policies and assessment is used well to help students to improve their work.

GEOGRAPHY

THE SCHOOL'S EXAMINATION RESULTS FOR 2000

	Entry	% A - B	%A - E	Average point score
Boys	7	42.9 (32.4)	100 (90.3)	6.3 (5.4)
Girls	3	66.7 (41.5)	100 (92.6)	6.7 (6.0)
Total	10	50 (36.6)	100 (91.4)	6.4 (5.6)

The scores in brackets are the national figures for comparison.

104. This is a highly effective subject. Standards attained by students in the Sixth Form are very high and are significantly above the averages for similar schools for A Level at all grades. Work seen in the current Year 13 shows that these very high standards are being maintained. Students' written work shows an excellent grasp of processes and environmental issues in geography. They are able to search for and evaluate research material well and present cogent arguments in essays. Most students can weigh evidence and draw well founded conclusions. The highest attaining students challenge ideas and concepts confidently and recognise flaws in arguments. Year 12 students also have made rapid progress on their AS course in developing a confident understanding and knowledge of their subject.

105. Students demonstrate similarly high levels of achievement in lessons. Most have a very good knowledge and understanding of geographic processes and patterns and of environment themes. In preparing for their coursework, they have drawn on a wide range of materials to produce rationales for their case studies that are clear, show a very good understanding of the topic and are sharply focused. This was shown in an excellent Year 13 lesson, where students worked in small groups searching for information in secondary sources and making reasoned evaluations on individual research themes.

106. Students' attitudes to learning are excellent. In nearly all lessons, excellent relationships, fostered by enthusiastic and stimulating teaching, contribute strongly to the positive attitude to learning. The vast majority of students respond well. They are eager, enthusiastic learners who readily engage in productive group and pair work, helping each other to search for information and solve problems.

107. Teaching overall is very good. All teaching is very good or excellent. The very good subject knowledge of teachers is skilfully transmitted to students through lively discourse from the teacher. It is invariably clear, stimulating and authoritative, drawing on many topical examples to illustrate and bring to life geographic themes. Very good use is made of audio visual aids such as video and photographs to reinforce students' understanding and stimulate class discussion.

108. Learning is accelerated in nearly all lessons by the very skilful management of students. Teachers' very high expectations encourage all to work at full pace. They create a relaxed, yet productive, atmosphere in classes that is highly conducive to learning. Teachers expect much of pupils. For example, in a Year 12 lesson on conflicts in land use on vulnerable coastlines, highly stimulating materials used by the teacher provoked a detailed and very good debate amongst the students. Teachers encourage students to persevere when faced with difficulty and, as a result, they readily engage in classroom activities, working with diligence and enthusiasm. Higher-attaining students in particular are attaining a deep understanding of complex geographic issues, such as the environmental conflict arising from urban development.

109. Questioning is often used effectively to challenge and develop students' understanding. The department skilfully uses a wide range of learning activities that are challenging, interesting and, invariably, well matched to the needs of individual students. This is raising attainment, particularly that of higher-attaining students. Group work, role-play and simulations are very well used to enable students to challenge and support each other in their learning. This was well demonstrated in a Year 12 lesson on energy resources, when students researched a topic and then shared their findings with the class.

110. In most lessons, good levels of concentration and interest are sustained by a brisk and purposeful pace. Time is used to the full, with teachers fully engaging pupils in productive and interesting tasks. These are very well matched to students' prior attainment, resulting in them maintaining interest and being actively involved in the lesson. The teachers' careful planning accelerates progress in most lessons. They design activities that encourage students to 'find out' rather than being 'told'. The confidence of teachers not to over direct students in this way is rewarded by the students' sense of achievement at their discovery of knowledge.

111. Homework is used well to support students' interest and understanding of their work. Many tasks are set that encourage students to develop research skills, particularly the use of computers to search for and present information. Nearly all students are keen to succeed and most understand the level they are achieving, because students' work is regularly and accurately marked. The many helpful and supportive comments encourage students to learn from their mistakes and move on.

112. The subject is very well led and managed by an efficient and effective head of department, working closely with a team of enthusiastic geographers who have a shared commitment to raise standards. An impressive feature of the subject is a willingness of teachers to be self-critical and to seek further ways to raise standards. The department identifies clear, quantified targets for improvements and devises strategies to reach them. The shared vision of the department fully matches that of the school. The geography staff complement each other in terms of their range of experience, and the head of department is beginning to have a strong impact on creating a culture of self-evaluation in the subject. Leadership would be enhanced through a more systematic approach to monitoring the work of the department, involving increased use of lesson observations and performance data.

HISTORY

THE SCHOOL'S EXAMINATION RESULTS FOR 2000

	Entry	% A - B	%A - E	Average point score
Boys	4	75 (32.8)	100 (87.3)	8 (5.3)
Girls	5	60 (34.1)	100 (88.0)	8 (5.4)
Total	9	66.7 (33.5)	100 (87.7)	8 (5.3)

The scores in brackets are the national figures for comparison.

113. Students' performance in GCE Advanced Level examinations over the past three years has shown a rapidly rising trend that reflects results well above the national average. This shows a considerable improvement compared with examination results in history at the time of the last inspection. A commendable 66 per cent gained the highest, A or B, grades, a success rate that is almost twice the national average. It is also a significant improvement on the 43 per cent achieved in 1999 and the 25 per cent achieved in 1998. Male students do particularly well. In 2000, all students commencing the course completed it satisfactorily, with the vast majority showing high achievement in terms of their prior attainment.

114. Observation of two lessons and a scrutiny of samples of students' work confirm that standards are well above average. Standards in the current Year 13 GCE A Level group are above average and some students are on course to achieve high grades. This indicates good achievement for many students in relation to their attainment in their GCSE history examinations. Students apply themselves to their work and complete fully all the requirements in terms of reading and research. They analyse historical sources critically and evaluate evidence to produce balanced arguments. For example, they justify their views about the success or otherwise of Napoleon III's foreign policy by reasoned argument. Their written work is carefully organised and structured and students make good progress in this aspect of their work as they move from Year 12 to Year 13. Essay writing is an area that has improved since the last inspection report. Students are able to express their views confidently in paired and group discussion. They use information and communication technology well for research and to help them present their work.

115. Students learn well in their courses in Sixth Form history, reflecting clear progression in the quality of their thinking and writing. This is because the teachers prepare thoroughly for their

lessons, in order to develop students' knowledge and the skills required for the GCE A Level course. The quality of teaching students receive is good overall. Teaching was very good in the lessons observed, demonstrating clear strengths of subject knowledge and an understanding of how students learn. Students are fully involved throughout their lessons, working on a good range of different activities. Consequently, they enjoy their lessons, which move along at a fast pace, and remain interested. Objectives are shared with students and their progress towards them is checked during and at the end of lessons. Tasks are well structured, and materials well prepared, such as when home-made cue cards are used as prompts to decide which are the important issues surrounding the unification of Italy.

116. The relationship between teachers and students is good and students help and support each other. They listen carefully to others, taking notes of the key points raised. Evaluation of their work by teachers is very good, with effective use of feedback sheets for completed essays. Students are well aware of how they can improve their work, because their teachers are setting very clear targets. This helps students to focus on addressing their individual weaknesses.

117. The subject is well managed by a very experienced head of department and the teachers work very well as a team. The work of the department is monitored well. They have a clear view of the priorities for further development of the subject and are committed to the maintenance of the high standards achieved in recent years.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

No results are available for last year, because 2001 will be the first year of entry.

118. Sports science was introduced in the Sixth Form as an A Level subject for the first time last year. At the time of the inspection, therefore, there were no examination results. The course has proved very popular and has begun very well. The standards achieved by current students in Years 12 and 13, as seen in their lessons, in their written work and in their projects, are above average. A few students in both years are working at the highest levels of attainment and the majority of students are working above the national average. Students are making good progress based on the predictions the school has made from their performance in GCSE examinations and the present Year 13 students are on course to achieve better than the targets set for them.

119. In the psychology unit, Year 13 students show a very good grasp of relevant and recent research material. When visiting a local leisure centre they had a deep appreciation of the changing role of the industry and displayed this in their articulate questioning. A particular strength of the subject is seen in Year 12 students' course work, where very high standards are reached in the presentation and evaluation of their personal exercise programmes. They use the schools' intranet and the internet independently and are able to extract information, share it with others and make their own notes, for example on external sporting bodies.

120. Students are mature, hardworking and show a keen interest and enthusiasm for the subject. Their very positive attitudes are illustrated in the amount of time and care that they put into their work and their very good relationships with one another and their teachers.

121. The majority of teaching is very good with one excellent and one good lesson observed during the inspection. Careful analysis of students' prior performance is well established as a whole school initiative and this has enabled teachers to focus their teaching on the individual needs of the group. Because of the very good planning and subject expertise of their teachers, students in both year groups quickly acquire new knowledge and increase their understanding of sports science. Teachers plan for a wide range of activities and it is the variety and practical elements of each lesson that motivate and challenge students. There is a strong focus on developing information, communication and technology skills. Students are expected to word process essays and course work, learn how to handle databases and make effective use of the internet for research purposes. In Year 12, students have responded very well to the new AS Levels; the result of highly focused and well-planned lessons.

122. The physical education department is very well managed and the very good quality of teaching comes about because of the positive relationships within the department and the effective monitoring of teaching. Students' work is marked constructively, with perceptive comments that provide helpful advice about how students can improve their work. Each term, students are set targets and have a mentor as part of a whole Sixth Form initiative. Physical education students in Year 12 have a second mentor, from within the department, to help with their personal exercise programme and project work. They thoroughly appreciate this extra support. Additional teachers, including two specialists from the science department, deliver each of the three course units. This results in excellent subject expertise. However, there is a lack of consistency of approach across the department in some aspects of its work, for example in developing a system of recording teachers' comments so that individual progress can be tracked by teachers and students. A growing strength is the very good range of learning support material being developed by the head of department in liaison with the librarian.

PHYSICS

THE SCHOOL'S EXAMINATION RESULTS FOR 2000

	Entry	% A - B	%A - E	Average point score
Boys	4	0 (38.5)	75 (86.4)	3.5 (5.5)
Girls	0	0 (44.6)	0 (89.9)	0 (6.0)
Total	4	0 (39.8)	75 (87.1)	3.5 (5.6)

The scores in brackets are the national figures for comparison.

123. The number of students choosing to study physics in the Sixth Form has been low for several years and, as a result, it is difficult to make valid judgements about overall attainment. The data from the last four years show considerable variation from year to year and, though the grades gained at advanced level in 1999 were above average, in 2000 they were below the national figure. Raising attainment has been a focus of development since the last inspection, and assessment and the monitoring of progress towards targets have been

central to this development. Consideration of progress through the Sixth Form in terms of GCSE grades gained in Year 11 across a range of subjects, suggests that results are improving, even though this may not be evident in any particular year. For 2001, the number of students studying the subject has increased considerably, from four in 2000 to 22, including seven girls, in 2001.

124. In lessons, students' work is broadly in line with national expectations and they produce very clear written work, with good explanations. Their work is thoroughly and constructively marked, and weaknesses are quickly picked up and corrected by the teacher. Scrutiny of folders indicates that they have a generally good understanding of the subject and that they make good progress. This is particularly true of lower-attaining students. The highest-attaining students join in discussions readily, and show that they can think critically about their subject. Most students have no difficulty with the application of number, because the teaching provides good support for those who have gaps in their knowledge. Students' literacy skills support the production of good written work. Some students are very keen to discuss their work and show a good level of understanding. They are keen to build on their understanding and extend their knowledge. However, others lack self-confidence and need encouragement to articulate their ideas: this is a skill which teachers need to work to develop, especially in lower-attaining students.

125. Teaching in physics is good overall; always at least good, and sometimes very good. Teachers' excellent subject knowledge and meticulous planning lead to orderly lessons in which students learn well both formally, from the teacher, and by watching demonstrations and undertaking practical work. The challenges set by teachers are well designed to support good learning and to develop the deeper understanding that leads to high quality analysis and evaluation. For example, in a lesson on the transfer of heat, pupils were given considerable freedom in the design of their experiment and had ample opportunity to compare results between groups. In a lesson on parallel plate capacitors, an excellent discussion between the teacher and the four students in the group challenged their understanding well, making them think carefully about the subject. In order to raise attainment further, the department needs to continue to develop its teaching strategies to ensure that all students are challenged consistently, with more support where needed. In particular, the pace of discussion in some lessons could be increased further, to ensure that pupils are fully committed throughout lessons and increase their depth of understanding. A very good system is already in place to set targets for students to work to, and this should provide a further stimulus for improvement.

126. The fourfold increase in the number of students studying physics has resulted in some difficulties in resourcing the subject. Some experimental work that would be better conducted as a class practical has to be demonstrated to the whole class by the teacher. This need covers several areas of the subject in which a demonstration to four students is practicable, but not to twenty-two. Although students produce work that is presented to a high standard, using information and communication technology, their learning in lessons is limited by a lack of sufficient computer equipment specific to the subject, such as data loggers. The school has recognised this and has recently invested heavily in developing resources. It is committed to continuing to do so as money becomes available to support further improvements in learning. The school has been monitoring the work of the department closely and this has led to improvements in students' levels of attainment.

SOCIOLOGY

THE SCHOOL'S EXAMINATION RESULTS FOR 2000

	Entry	% A - B	%A - E	Average point score
Boys	2	50 (29.7)	100 (81.7)	7 (4.8)
Girls	14	50 (37.2)	100 (86.9)	7.3 (5.5)
Total	16	50 (35.4)	100 (85.7)	7.25 (5.3)

The scores in brackets are the national figures for comparison.

127. This is a highly effective subject. Standards of work in sociology are consistently very high. The GCE A Level examination results are significantly higher than the national average at both the higher grades and in the overall pass rate. Students' course work is a particularly strong aspect, where high marks are consistently achieved. The current Year 13 is sustaining the very high standards of previous years. Students' written work shows a very good, and often excellent, grasp of the major theoretical perspectives and research methodologies. They are able to marshal relevant evidence well to make class presentations and address essay questions. The vast majority of students can weigh evidence effectively and draw conclusions that are well founded in evidence. Higher-attaining students confidently challenge the validity of evidence when they detect methodological flaws. The writing skills of these students in particular are very well focused, reflecting an easy command of the subject.

128. In all lessons, students invariably demonstrate similarly high standards of achievement. Through their use of small case studies in the preparation for their course work, they show a very good understanding of their subject. Most have a very good awareness of the relevant research in the area and have a confident knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the methods they use.

129. Year 13 students make impressive progress in their acquisition of knowledge, understanding of concepts and development of skills. They have a considerable capacity to apply this knowledge and understanding when addressing contemporary sociological questions and issues. This was very well illustrated in a lesson where students researched and then made presentations to the class on the influence of 'pressure groups'. Although at an earlier stage in their course, Year 12 students are already making very good progress in their knowledge and understanding of the subject.

130. Students' attitudes to the subject are excellent and fully reflect their achievements. They are articulate, enthusiastic and hard working. In their approach to learning, they are diligent and mature and respond very well to the challenges presented to them and work very well both individually and collaboratively.

131. The subject is taught very well. Teaching is characterised by a thorough and confident command of their teaching material. A purposeful learning environment has been created which is marked by very good relationships with students. All lessons have clear and appropriate objectives, which are shared with students. These objectives are pursued in a highly effective way with expertise and imagination utilising a variety of stimulating and

interesting activities. These include whole class discussion, group work, individual and paired work and confident presentations by students. The variety of these activities in lessons and the rapid pace of learning help to maintain interest and ensure that all students are working at full pace.

132. The teacher's explanations of concepts and ideas are invariably clear, authoritative and stimulating and make very good use of contemporary issues and events to illustrate ideas and provoke discussion. This was very well shown in an excellent Year 13 lesson, where the recent 'fuel protest' was well used by the teacher to provoke a vigorous discussion on the effectiveness of pressure groups. Questioning is used very well to consolidate understanding, monitor progress and challenge students understanding.

133. A very strong feature of teaching is the consolidation of students' learning through such strategies as spider diagrams, which are used effectively to establish links between different topics and themes. Writing frames are used very well to successfully develop students' essay writing skills. There is a very strong focus on ICT skills. Students invariably word process their essays and coursework and make effective use of the internet to search for and evaluate information. The department has encouraged students to develop a determination to learn and achieve well and this is a strong feature of the highly effective teaching.

134. Assessment is very well used to monitor and improve students' progress and learning. Students' work is marked with rigour and consistency and perceptive comments by the teacher provides helpful advice to them about how they can improve their work.

135. Leadership and management of the subject are outstanding. Planning for the new AS/A2 syllabus has been thorough and thoughtful. It is a self-evaluating department that is constantly looking for ways to further improve standards. A particularly strong feature is the use of the subject to glean the views of students on aspects of their learning experience which is then well used to refine and improve teaching.

OTHER SIXTH FORM COURSES

136. Results in the 2000 examination for **GCE A Level Theatre Studies** were slightly below the national average. The group contained some lower attaining students who did not attain high grades in any of the courses they were studying. In the previous year, 31 per cent of students obtained A or B grades. The higher attaining student in 2000 performed well in theatre studies and attained a high grade. The finding of the inspection is that current students in both Year 12 and Year 13 are on line to attain close to national average grades and that attainment in lessons is average overall.

137. The students show a good understanding of drama theory and they gave a rapid and thorough recap of Stanislavski's theories at the start of a lesson on building and sustaining a character and adding pace to their improvised scene. They have good ensemble skills, working for and with each other: responding in role to the actions and words of others with ease and confidence. They can work in a range of acting styles; the higher attainers working with equal skill in mime, with masks or in ritual drama. Their improvisation skills are above average overall, although some, especially girls, show greater skills than others in using imagination and a sense of

drama to bring a scene to life. Overall, their range of performance skills is at least satisfactory. Through character, voice, movement, status and position on stage, they can bring characters to life convincingly and present a range of conflicts and emotions in such a way as to interest and involve an audience. The quality of their written work is satisfactory overall, with the higher attaining girls again producing many examples of above average work. They write in detail of plays they have seen and their portfolios reflect their study in depth of a wide range of subjects related to the theatre studies examination syllabus. Some of the lower attaining candidates would benefit from more advice on constructing and drafting an essay,

138. Students' attitudes are very positive. They work hard, collaborate very well, sustain their concentration for long periods and are willing to take risks and learn from their mistakes. The atmosphere of total trust that the teachers have succeeded in developing is a vital factor in the progress students make in this subject. The teaching is consistently good. The teachers have very good knowledge of their subject and plan lessons well. They ensure a brisk pace and are not afraid to set high levels of challenge. Questioning is used well understanding and to make them think for themselves. The department is well led and the drama area is managed and organised effectively.

139. Attainment in **general studies** is well above the national average. Of the 61 students who were entered in 2000, the first year of entry, all attained a pass grade. Two thirds of the boys and four fifths of the girls passed with highest grades, A or B. This was a remarkable achievement. The levels of attainment seen in the inspection indicate that students are on course to attain above average standards this year.

140. They have good knowledge of the syllabus and are able to write on topics with clarity and understanding, largely as a result of good teaching and many opportunities in class to discuss and test out ideas. Lessons are lively and well prepared. The teaching is never less than good and is very good in a quarter of lessons. In a lesson on *morality and science*, the teacher had a very good knowledge of the subject and had prepared the lesson well to stimulate and challenge the students. They met the high teacher's high expectations, engaging in a sensible and informed debate. One girl made a particularly articulate and knowledgeable attack on scientists who seek to play at being God. The teacher's very good rapport with the students enabled them to respond with confidence as they were challenged by exacting questions that forced them to extend their answers and think ever more deeply.

141. The work done in general studies reinforces the students' command of key skills. Work on the science and mathematics extends their numeracy skills and throughout the course literacy and oracy skills are developed well, with particular emphasis on the quality of written work. Students also develop their skills in ICT, making regular use of word processors, graphics packages, spreadsheets and powerpoint presentations to enhance their work. General studies is a well organised and well taught course that is adding significant value to Sixth Form education at the school.