

INSPECTION REPORT

ST ANNE'S CONVENT SCHOOL

Southampton

LEA area: Southampton

Unique reference number: 116509

Headteacher: Ms Catherine Hargaden

Reporting inspector: Philip J H O'Neill
3162

Dates of inspection: 14 –17 January 2002

Inspection number: 189288

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: Voluntary Aided

Age range of students: 11 - 18

Gender of students: Girls

School address: Rockstone Place
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Appropriate authority: The governing body

Name of chair of governors: Mr G Colbourne

Date of previous inspection: September 1996

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PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

St Anne's Convent School is a comprehensive school for girls aged 11 to 18 years. In 1999 the school returned to voluntary-aided status having formerly been managed as a grant-maintained school for five years. There are 1116 students on roll of whom 91 are in the sixth form. Since the last inspection, sixth form numbers have declined, although numbers in the main school have increased so that the overall roll has remained stable. As a Catholic school the catchment extends beyond the immediate area, drawing from some 50 primary schools in the Southampton and Hampshire area. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals has remained stable over the past few years; it is currently six per cent and is below the national average. The proportion of students speaking English as an additional language, at four per cent, is higher than in most schools. At 17 per cent, the proportion of students coming from non-UK heritage groups is more than in most schools. The school has identified ten per cent of students as having special educational need: this is well below average. The percentage of students with statements of special educational need, at 0.4 per cent, is also well below average. There are 2 students with identified special needs in the sixth form.

Last year 16 students joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission, whilst 35 students left the school other than at the usual time of leaving. The level of mobility, at around five per cent, is largely accounted for by changing parental employment. The percentage of students continuing with full-time education after the age of 16, at 96 per cent, is very high. Seventy-six per cent of students enrolled for courses in higher or further education in 2001 after completing sixth form courses at the school. A good proportion of the girls stays on into the sixth form but many attend the local colleges and other larger sixth forms. The school is oversubscribed. Students join the school with above-average levels of attainment. The school has been identified as a Beacon School, that is a school where there is particularly good practice and additional funding to support the sharing of this good practice with other schools.

HOW GOOD THE SCHOOL IS

St Anne's Convent is a very good school that achieves high standards. Teachers and students demonstrate high levels of commitment to their work and relationships are conducive to the creation of a very good climate for learning. The leadership and management of the school are very effective in supporting its work. The school gives good value for money.

What the school does well

- The leadership of the headteacher and senior colleagues is very effective in promoting high standards.
- A high proportion of good and very good teaching leads to rapid increases in the students' knowledge, understanding and skills.
- The quality of relationships throughout the school is a real strength; students have purposeful and committed attitudes to their learning.
- The provision for students' spiritual and moral development is outstanding.
- The school's work to ensure that all students are included to the full extent of their competence is very successful.

What could be improved

- Assessment is not always used well enough to help students identify how well they are doing and how to improve.

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 then, it has moved forward in leaps and bounds in continuing to meet its aim to provide a Christian education for its students. Very good standards of attainment have been maintained. The response to the issues raised in the previous inspection was immediate and decisive. Steps were taken to ensure that students were more fully involved in their own learning through greater emphasis on structured group work and support for independent study. There is now a much broader range of teaching strategies. Teachers pay greater attention to making the point of the lesson clear and, at the end of the lesson, to helping students summarise what they have learned. Planning for the future development of the school is more clearly rooted in the school's needs: it is realistic, clearly costed and driven by a wholehearted concern for the interests of the students. Since the last inspection the numbers in the sixth form have fallen. This remains a matter of concern to the school. The governors and staff have done much to offer the right kinds of courses in the sixth form and are steadily becoming better placed to complement what other providers of post-16 education offer.

STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with			
	All schools			Similar schools
	1999	2000	2001	2001
GCSE examinations	A	A	A	A
A-levels/AS-levels	A	C	A	N/A

Key	
well above average	A
above average	B
average	C
below average	D
well below average	E

In the 2001 national tests at the end of Year 9, students' results in English, mathematics and science were well above average in relation to all schools nationally and very high for schools in similar circumstances. This places the school's results in the highest five per cent nationally. In the assessments conducted by the teachers at this stage, students' results were well above average in art, design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. Attainment was below average in information and communication technology. These results are broadly reflected in the work seen during the inspection. The school has maintained these very good standards since the last inspection.

The table above shows that GCSE results are well above average, in relation both to all schools and to similar schools. Relative to other subjects in the 2001 GCSE

examinations, the highest standards were reached in art and design, geography, history, home economics and religious education. The subjects that fared comparatively less well were drama, English literature, French and Spanish. The school sets and meets challenging targets for attainment. For example, students achieve good and sometimes very good standards in English, particularly in Years 7, 10 and 11. There is a similar pattern in mathematics and science. Standards in art and design and technology are mainly satisfactory from Years 7 to 11. In geography and history they range from good to satisfactory in these years. Overall standards in modern foreign languages in Years 7 to 11 are satisfactory, but clearly improving. In lessons seen in these years in drama, standards are satisfactory, but good to very good in music. Standards seen in physical education are good in dance and gymnastics, with evidence of good to very good progress in both these activities.

Attainment at A-level over the last few years has fluctuated from well above average to average. In 2001, results were well above average overall, with some very high attainment. The highest-attaining subjects were biology, chemistry and general studies, whilst the lowest-attaining subjects were English literature, business studies, German and history. In the work seen in the sixth form, standards were good overall, with some very good work in English and German and work that was at too low a standard in theatre studies.

The students generally achieve well in relation to their increasing levels of attainment. In history in Years 7 to 9, however, students are not always challenged enough and sometimes settle for modest advances in their work. Students with special educational needs respond well to the good support they receive. The more able and talented students make the advances in learning that are consistent with their capabilities. Students for whom English is an additional language make good advances in learning.

STUDENTS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Students are highly motivated in their studies and work very hard. They enjoy what the school offers them and value the commitment of the teachers.
Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Behaviour is almost invariably very good. Students are courteous to each other, to staff and to visitors. There are a few students whose behaviour is less good.
Personal development and relationships	Students respond well to the opportunities offered to them to take responsibility for themselves and their learning. The very good quality of relationships among students and between students and teachers is a striking feature of the school, which is a lively learning community.
Attendance	Attendance is very good. There is virtually no unauthorised absence. Punctuality is good and lessons start on time.

The students have a real affection for the school and appreciate the effort the teachers make to help them to achieve to the best of their capabilities. They, in turn, do their best to refine and improve their work even when they are confronted with demanding tasks.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

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

The overall quality of teaching is good across the school and very good in Years 10 to 11. There is a high proportion of very good teaching and, occasionally, teaching that is excellent. Very little teaching is less than satisfactory. A key strength of the teaching is the extent of the teachers' subject knowledge and the quality of planning. In the very best lessons, teachers weave a creative web of stimulating activities to which the students respond with imagination and earnestness. In the sixth form the most striking feature of teaching is the teachers' persistence with challenging questions, not allowing the students to settle for unexplored ideas or those that do not rest on a secure justification. The clarity of thought that ensues reveals itself in much of the written work. English, mathematics and science are taught well. Students through Years 7 to 11 are given a good foundation in literacy and numeracy and steadily build up their skills in information and communication technology.

Teaching is occasionally weakened when lessons do not get off to a clear start and students are slow to settle down to their work. Weaknesses occur also when teachers do not make enough contact with individual learners in lessons and miss opportunities to assess how well individual students are getting on.

Students are good learners. They are quick to acquire new knowledge and skills, applying themselves to their work with sustained concentration. They generally know how they are achieving and what they need to do to improve. The students with special educational needs work hard to achieve the targets set for them in their individual education plans and delight in their often hard-won achievements. The more able and talented students make the advances in learning that are consistent with their capabilities as a result of the good teaching they experience. The school reaches out to all students to ensure that, irrespective of talent, temperament or attainment, their needs are met.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	The curriculum at Key Stage 3 and 4 covers the full range of National Curriculum subjects. There is a satisfactory range of courses in the sixth form, with good plans afoot further to enrich what is provided.
Provision for students with special educational needs	Students with special educational needs receive good support within lessons and when they are withdrawn for additional help. They make the same progress as their peers.

Provision for students with English as an additional language	The school provides well for students for whom English is an additional language, to enable them to participate to the full extent of their competence.
Provision for students' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Provision for students' spiritual and moral development is a strength of the school. There are many opportunities to allow students to reflect on issues of significance in their lives. Students are well supported in coming to an appreciation of their own culture and the diversity of culture within British society and beyond it.
How well the school cares for its students	The school takes very good care of its students. The teachers know individual students well and give them good pastoral support and sound academic guidance overall. There are some weaknesses in the use of assessment to help students improve.

The school works very well with parents in supporting the students' learning. Parents support the school very strongly and value what it provides for their daughters.

HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

Aspect	Comment
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	The headteacher, supported by her senior colleagues, has been very effective in providing a clear sense of purpose for the work of the school.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	The governors are diligent in the exercise of their distinctive responsibilities.
The school's evaluation of its performance	The governors and staff do much to compare their performance with that of other schools. This is particularly the case in the development of the sixth form.
The strategic use of resources	Governors and staff are closely involved in ensuring that the school's funds and resources are directed towards its agreed priorities. They have taken a clear long-term view of the school's development. They have been particularly diligent in reflecting on and planning for the future of the sixth form.

There is a very good supply of appropriately qualified teachers and support staff to teach the full range of the curriculum well. The range of resources is satisfactory, but used well. Accommodation is unsatisfactory in that there is insufficient outdoor space and some classrooms are too small for the larger groups. However, what is striking is the care taken by the site managers and the caretaking and cleaning staff to maintain a very high level of cleanliness and maintenance of the buildings. The governors take every step to ensure that, in all significant expenditure or use of resources, decisions are rooted in clear judgements of cost and value.

PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

What pleases parents most	What parents would like to see improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the progress their children are making • the school expects their children to work hard and do their best • the school is helping their children to become mature and responsible • the attitudes and values the school promotes 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the amount of work their children are expected to do at home • the information they are given about their children's progress • the way the school works with parents to support their children's learning

The inspection supports the parents' overall positive views about the school. Some parents thought that the amount of homework was excessive. The inspection finds that the amount of homework is generally appropriate, although students sometimes allow it to accumulate. The inspection findings are that the school provides an adequate amount of information for parents about their children's progress, but that it is offered too late in the academic year to be helpful. The inspection finds that, through the use of students' logbooks, the school makes a good effort to work with parents to support their children's learning.

INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form of St Anne's Convent School has been designated as St Anne's Sixth Form College. It has 91 students on roll. Numbers have declined steadily over recent years. Though the sixth form offers a satisfactory range of courses, small numbers make it difficult to satisfy the choices of all the students. Students are mainly recruited from St Anne's, with a few coming from other schools. Overall results at GCSE, for those joining the sixth form, are above average, with a significant proportion showing average standards. All students study mainly three or four subjects in Year 12, depending on their results in the GCSE examinations. A very high proportion of students enrolls on courses in higher or further education after completing sixth form studies at the school. About one-third of students stay on in the sixth form after Year 11. About one-tenth of the students come from other schools. Those that choose not to stay do so for a variety of reasons. Some wish to move to a mixed college. Most just feel the need for a change of environment. The minimum requirement for entry to the sixth form is five passes at grade C in the GCSE examinations.

HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

This is an effective sixth form. Though its costs are high for the number of students it caters for, it serves its students very well with good teaching, a good range of courses and the attention and care required to sustain their studies at a level commensurate with their capabilities. It is well managed. Currently, the sixth form provides satisfactory value for money.

Strengths

- The standards achieved in the great majority of subjects are good.
- The students experience a high proportion of good and very good teaching.
- The very good relationships between the students and their teachers support good learning.

What could be improved

- The use of assessment is not always refined enough to enable students to improve their work.
- Information and communication technology is not used well enough to support independent research.
- The guidance and direction given to students on their work and in reflecting on their careers is not managed well enough.

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

THE QUALITY OF PROVISION IN INDIVIDUAL CURRICULUM AREAS

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

Curriculum area	Overall judgement about provision, with comment
Mathematics	Very good. A-Level results tend to be above national averages. This is consistent with the standards of work inspected. Teaching is good and students achieve well. Strong relationships between the students and the teachers encourage a real partnership in learning. The department is very well managed. Not enough use is made of information and communication technology.
Chemistry	Good. The good standards in examinations are reflected in the students' work. The quality of teaching is good and students make good advances in learning through close attention to their work. Leadership and management are good. Computers are not used enough to support learning.
Geography	Good. Standards in geography are above average at A level. They are high at AS level. The subject is well taught and, although groups are small, all students enjoy success. Students are well prepared for their examinations through very good guidance. There is insufficient use of information and communication technology for teaching purposes and too few opportunities for fieldwork and other enrichment within the curriculum. The subject is well led and soundly managed.
English	Good. Standards attained are good and students achieve well, particularly in English language. Teaching is good, often very good and sometimes excellent. Students are good learners and eager to succeed. Not enough use is made of information and communication technology to develop independent research. The department is well led and managed.
German	Very Good. Standards reached are good and students make very good progress from their attainment on joining their courses. Teaching is very good, with some that is excellent. Students make good use of the opportunities to use information and communication technology to extend their work. Leadership and management of the department are good.

Good standards were noted in lessons seen in biology, physics, history and art. One lesson in theatre studies and one in business studies was inspected. Standards in theatre studies were not high enough for sixth-form work, whilst in business studies over-direction did not give the students the opportunity to explore ideas for themselves. In health and social care, students make very good advances in coming to grips with demanding ideas.

OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	The educational and personal support and guidance provided for students are good. Though the school does much to support students in their academic work and guide them towards the next stage in their lives, what is provided is not always clear enough to be helpful. The students feel that they are not always sufficiently aware of how they are doing and how they might direct their efforts towards improving their work.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	The sixth form is well led. The director brings to the task a clear vision for its future and the breadth and depth of understanding to sustain it through the current difficulties with falling numbers. The governors are very closely involved in looking critically at what needs to be done to ensure the continued provision of a viable sixth form.

STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the challenge they experience in the teaching • teachers are accessible for help • the information they get to support their courses • that they are helped to study independently 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the information provided about progress • careers advice • support and help in personal problems • extra-curricular opportunities

The inspection evidence supports the students' overall high level of approval of their experience of the sixth form. Their appreciation of the quality of teaching, the accessibility of teachers and the quality of information provided for them is confirmed by inspection findings. Inspectors also agree that much is done to support independent study. Inspectors agree with the students that they are not always helped to be clear about how they are progressing in their work. Though there are some stimulating extra-curricular activities, such as the sports leadership award scheme, inspectors agree that, overall, extra-curricular activities are limited.

COMPARING PROVISION IN SCHOOLS AND COLLEGES

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

PART B: COMMENTARY

WHAT THE SCHOOL DOES WELL

The leadership of the headteacher and her senior colleagues is very effective in promoting high standards.

1. The clarity of the headteacher's vision for the future direction of the school and the excellent support she receives from her deputies and other senior colleagues lie at the heart of the school's success. The governors, too, are diligent in the exercise of their responsibility to hold the school to account for the quality of what it provides. The headteacher has a clear view of what is required to sustain the very good standards attained by the students and to extend further the range of opportunities available to them. This is particularly the case in relation to the sixth form. Both staff and governors support her determination to ensure that St Anne's School remains an excellent provider of a Christian education and prepares its students to feel at home in the world, through the attainment of standards that match their capabilities.
2. The school's aims to be a Christian community. This aim is not just an idle aspiration but lies at the very heart of the school's work. In the context of its commitment to Christian principles, the school reaches out to all its students, ensuring that they are fully included in all that it provides. Students of any faith or none and those coming to grips with their own, often unclear, beliefs are made to feel secure and part of the school family. It is this strong sense of belonging that is the most powerful influence on the students' interest in their work and their will to succeed. This is a school that is thoroughly committed to its aims.
3. Planning for the school's development is informed by a shared sense of vision and purpose. It is clearly geared to the raising of standards of attainment and the improvement of teaching and learning. The long strategic look at where the school is heading never clouds the key purpose of breathing life into classrooms. That it does this to an eminent degree is revealed in the quality of the teaching and the earnestness of the students' learning. Innovation is presented not as an additional burden to be carried by teachers, but as a way of freeing their imagination in order to work more efficiently.
4. The detailed analysis of how it is performing keeps the school on track in meeting its key objectives. In this respect, the governors play a pivotal role. Their very good knowledge of the school places them in a good position to support its work. The monitoring and support of teachers is constructive and helpful. A particular strength is the excellent use made of funds and initiatives generated as a result of the school's Beacon status. These are used particularly well in collaborative work with other schools in the sharing of good practice.

A high proportion of good and very good teaching leads to rapid increases in the students' knowledge, understanding and skills.

5. The overall quality of teaching is good across the school and very good in Years 10 and 11. There is a high proportion of very good teaching. Very little teaching is less than satisfactory. Of the lessons seen, the quality of teaching was excellent in one in every twenty-five; very good in around one in three; good in around half; satisfactory in under one in five, and less than satisfactory in just two lessons seen.

6. Key strengths of the teaching are the extent of the teachers' knowledge of the subjects they teach and the quality of their planning. This leads to lessons that are informed by a clarity of purpose and the involvement of all students to the full extent of their competence. This was evident, for example, in a very good English lesson in Year 7. Here the teacher steadily built up the challenge of the task that was focused on understanding the language of advertising. All the students were engaged at the right level for them through working in groups and in pairs. The teacher's eagle eye ensured that all the students contributed their best efforts in their oral and in their written work. In the very best lessons, teachers provide a progressively challenging range of stimulating activities to which the students respond with enthusiasm and sustained effort. This lies at the heart of much teaching in mathematics and physical education. The quality of the planning of lessons was a marked feature of teaching in music. The sense of order and purpose in music lessons and in the work of the choir shows itself in disciplined and ordered performances. In the sixth form, the most striking feature of teaching is the teachers' challenging questions, which test the students to the full. The students, in turn, rise to the challenge of demanding work and try their best to tackle even the most intractable problems. The clarity of thought that ensues reveals itself in much of the written work. English, mathematics and science are taught well. Students through Years 7 to 11 are given a good foundation in literacy and numeracy and steadily build up their skills in information and communication technology. This work is extended in the sixth form.
7. Students are eager learners. They are quick to acquire new knowledge and skills, applying themselves to their work with sustained concentration. They generally know what standard they are achieving and what they need to do to improve and they are eager to do so. The students with special educational needs work hard to achieve the targets set for them in their individual education plans and do their very best to refine and improve their often hard-won achievements. The more able and talented students, through work that is sufficiently demanding, build on their already high levels of knowledge and skill at a good rate. The school makes every possible effort to ensure that students engage in their work and succeed in a way that does justice to their capabilities and their desire to learn.

The quality of relationships throughout the school is a real strength; students have purposeful and committed attitudes to their learning.

8. This is a community where the students enjoy a truly friendly environment. Teachers and students relate very well to one another, whilst maintaining a clear understanding of their different roles in the school community. The school behaviour policy is rooted in a common understanding of what it is to listen to others and respect their feelings. Students clearly behave very well, not from the constraint of rules, but out of principle. In all their dealings with the students in relation to behaviour, staff do not rush to judgement but listen to the different protagonists, giving them the assurance that justice will be done. More importantly, students strongly expressed the view that, should they cross the boundaries of what is permitted, they will be forgiven and embraced by the school community. This open but structured environment allows students' imaginations to thrive. The students are eloquent in their appreciation of the convivial world the school represents for them.

9. The students feel at home in lessons and are willing to take risks with their opinions and suggestions. They are eager to produce their best efforts in all their work. The work seen during the inspection revealed much that is well ordered and neatly presented, showing great attention to detail. Lessons are often hives of purposeful activity, with students vying with one another in a constructive and friendly way. There are many examples across the years of students undertaking independent study, for example using the Internet to research their assignments.

The provision for students' spiritual and moral development is outstanding.

10. The school's commitment to the spiritual and moral development of the students is revealed in the quality of assemblies. For example, an excellent assembly was prepared for students in the sixth form. It involved the students listening to examples of different languages spoken by students from different countries. This related to the theme of communication and the fact that we all seek to understand and convey that understanding in different languages and in different cultures. This occasion revealed the strong bond of friendship between the director of the sixth form and the students. A real sense of sensitive awareness pervaded the assembly. The content was skilfully directed towards the personal concerns of the students. Lessons in personal and social education deal with a wide range of issues that relate to the moral lives and sensibilities of the students.
11. Many lessons use the opportunities that arise to relate what is learned to the lives of the students. For example, the power of advertising is explored in English lessons. In history, teachers are careful to allow students to reflect, for example on the morality of war or the effects of power and ambition on the course of history. In geography, the question of responsibility for the environment is discussed. There are many moments of thoughtfulness when issues of significance are not left in the cold realm of fact, but allowed to touch the students' sensibilities. Students' moral development is rooted in a clear understanding of the place in their lives of the Christian way of life. This is clearly reflected in the school's mission statement, which both describes the school and expresses what it hopes to become.

The school is very successful in its work to ensure that all students are included to the full extent of their competence.

12. The general sense of justice and fairness that marks the life of the school reveals itself in greater detail in the school's day-to-day dealings with the students. In lessons, questioning is geared to involve all the students, irrespective of talent or temperament. Setting arrangements work to the advantage of students at all levels of attainment, in that they are based on accurate measures of attainment. Groups are adjusted where appropriate. Students with special educational needs are supported well, either through additional support in lessons or through withdrawal from lessons for special help. The few students for whom English is an additional language are supported thoroughly until they reach the level of fluency in English that matches that of their peers. When students experience difficulties in their lives the school marshals all its resources to support them and help them return to normality.

WHAT COULD BE IMPROVED

Assessment is not always used well enough to help students identify how well they are doing and how to improve.

13. There is much very useful information gathered from the results of tests, which is analysed thoroughly and used well in monitoring students' overall progress. Furthermore, teachers give a good proportion of their time helping students with their work and in their personal lives. However, in lessons, assessment is not always used to best effect in finding out how individual students are getting on. This arises, in the main, because teachers do not always manage lessons in a way that would make it possible for them to spend time with individual learners in order to get a more accurate picture of their attainment and of where they experience barriers to learning. Emerging in the senior management team is a growing awareness of the importance of focusing on individual learners; this is already showing itself in some good practice.

WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?

- (1) Use assessment more effectively to help students identify how well they are doing and how they might improve their work.
(Paragraph 13)

SIXTH FORM

- (2) Use assessment more effectively to support the students' learning by:
- identifying more clearly with individual students how well they are achieving in relation to their target grades;
 - providing all students with more structured time for individual subject tutorials in order to point the way forward in their work;
 - analysing and spreading the good practice that already exists, for example in mathematics and geography.
(Paragraphs 29, 31)
- (3) Use information and communication technology more effectively to support learning by:
- encouraging students to use computers more in independent research;
 - monitoring more carefully the extent to which individual subjects make appropriate use of information and communication technology in teaching.
(Paragraphs 45, 48, 56, 72)
- (4) Improve the quality of the support and guidance given to students on their work and in reflecting on their careers by:
- attending more carefully to the needs of individual students.
(Paragraph 38)

PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

Summary of the sources of evidence for the inspection

Number of lessons observed

Years 7-11

48

Sixth form

28

Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and students

31

Summary of teaching observed during the inspection

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
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Years 7 to 11

Number	1	14	19	13	1	0	0
Percentage	2	29	40	27	2	0	0

Sixth form

Number	2	7	15	3	0	1	0
Percentage	7	25	54	11	0	3	0

The table gives the number and percentage of lessons observed in each of the seven categories used to make judgements about teaching. Care should be taken when interpreting the percentages for as each lesson in Years 7 to 11 represents more than one percentage point and in the Sixth Form more than two.

Information about the school's students**Students on the school's roll**

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students on the school's roll	1025	91
Number of full-time students known to be eligible for free school meals	60	0

Special educational needs

	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of students with statements of special educational needs	2	0
Number of students on the school's special educational needs register	110	2

English as an additional language

	No of students
Number of students with English as an additional language	54

Pupil mobility in the last school year

	No of students
Students who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	16
Students who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	35

Attendance

Authorised absence

%

Unauthorised absence

%

School data	6.9
National comparative data	8.1

School data	0.0
National comparative data	1.1

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	0	195	195

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	181	168	174
	Total	181	168	174
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	93 (91)	86 (81)	89 (82)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)]
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	60 (59)	71 (57)	67 (54)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of students at NC level 5 and above	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	182	167	178
	Total	182	167	178
Percentage of students at NC level 5 or above	School	94 (83)	86 (83)	92 (91)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of students at NC level 6 or above	School	56 (45)	63 (54)	68 (58)
	National	31 (31)	42 (39)	33 (29)

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

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

Number of registered students in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	0	188	188

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of students achieving the standard specified	Boys	N/A	N/A	N/A
	Girls	132	184	188
	Total	132	184	188
Percentage of students achieving the standard specified	School	70 (76)	98 (98)	100 (98)
	National	48 (47)	91 (91)	96 (96)

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

GCSE results		GCSE point score
Average point score per pupil	School	51.2 (53)
	National	39 (38.4)

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

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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2001	0	63	63

Average A/AS points score per candidate	For candidates entered for 2 or more A-levels or equivalent			For candidates entered for fewer than 2 A-levels or equivalent		
	Male	Female	All	Male	Female	All
School	N/A	19.5 (16.3)	19.5 (16.3)	N/A	N/a (2.3)	N/a (2.3)
National	(17.7)	(18.8)	(18.2)	(2.6)	(2.9)	(2.7)

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

Vocational qualifications		Number	% success rate
Number in their final year of studying for approved vocational qualifications or	School	11	100

units and the percentage of those students who achieved all those they studied	National		N/a
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Ethnic background of students

	No of students
Black – Caribbean heritage	10
Black – African heritage	3
Black – other	7
Indian	27
Pakistani	4
Bangladeshi	0
Chinese	9
White	1046
Any other minority ethnic group	34

Teachers and classes

Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y13

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	63.58
Number of students per qualified teacher	17.5

Education support staff: Y7 – Y13

Total number of education support staff	19
Total aggregate hours worked per week	437

Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y13

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	74.0
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Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y13

Key Stage 3	27.5
Key Stage 4	23.0

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Recruitment of teachers

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	19.93
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	16.59
Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	2
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	3.61
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage		
Black – African heritage		
Black – other		
Indian		
Pakistani		
Bangladeshi		
Chinese		
White	22	1
Other minority ethnic groups		

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

Financial information

Financial year	2000/2001
	£
Total income	3141805
Total expenditure	3134392
Expenditure per pupil	2733
Balance brought forward from previous year	211060
Balance carried forward to next year	218473

FTE means full-time equivalent.

Results of the survey of parents and carers

Questionnaire return rate

Number of questionnaires sent out	976
Number of questionnaires returned	241

Percentage of responses in each category

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	49	38	11	2	0
My child is making good progress in school.	51	43	2	0	4
Behaviour in the school is good.	32	52	9	2	5
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	29	53	14	3	1
The teaching is good.	40	47	6	1	6
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	27	45	18	7	3
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	49	34	10	4	3
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	69	29	2	0	0
The school works closely with parents.	28	43	19	6	4
The school is well led and managed.	50	39	5	2	4
The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.	50	40	5	1	4
The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.	40	46	7	4	3

Other issues raised by parents

There were many written submissions expressing strong support for the sixth form. A few expressed some misgivings about the management of behaviour and about the marking of homework.

PART D: THE SIXTH FORM

HOW HIGH ARE STANDARDS?

The school's results and students' achievements

14. Attainment at A Level fluctuates from well above average to average but is above average overall. In 2001, results were well above average overall, with some very high attainment. The students, in this year, joined the sixth form with lower than usual standards of attainment. The highest-attaining subjects were biology, chemistry and general studies, whilst the lowest-attaining subjects were English literature, business studies, German and history.
15. In the work seen in the sixth form, standards were above average overall, ranging from some very good work in English and German and work that was at too low a standard in theatre studies. The highest standards were noted in German. Some very good work was seen, too, in some of the Year 12 studies in English language when students demonstrated a refined grasp of the intricacies of persuasive language. In most other subjects students reach above-average standards in their work. In some English literature lessons in Year 13, though teaching remains good, the students' response to poetry tends to be over-descriptive. In history, students do not come to their course with a high level of skills in analysis. This occasionally holds them back from making the advances in learning of which they are capable.
16. The students generally achieve well in relation to their increasing levels of attainment. The more able and talented students make the advances in learning that are consistent with their capabilities. In relation to the standards which students brought to their courses, students in the A-Level examinations in 2001 achieved best in physics, Spanish and general studies, whilst achievement was lowest in art, business studies and in history, where there are weaknesses in the students' skills in critical thinking. At AS Level, the best achievement in relation to prior attainment was in English language, English literature, mathematics, design and technology, history and GNVQ health and social care, whilst the poorest achievement was in biology and French.

Students' attitudes, values and personal development

17. Students in both Years 12 and 13 have very good attitudes toward learning and are very keen to do well. In lessons they are enthusiastic and contribute ideas and answers with a sense of maturity and confidence. This broadens their learning very well, as they respond to teachers' challenging questions with thoughtful answers. Students work very well independently. Overall, their responses to the questionnaire, completed for the purposes of the inspection, were positive. However, they also put forward illuminating suggestions for improvement of the sixth form.
18. A cornerstone of the very good relationships in the sixth form is the mutual respect among students and all members of staff. Parents and students are very pleased with this distinguishing feature of the school. Students support each other very well and work productively in small groups. Class discussions are worthwhile and enable all students to participate, as the positive atmosphere does not inhibit anyone from risking an incorrect answer or a new idea. Year 13 history students, for example, engaged in a high level discussion about the Reformation; with their teacher's guidance, sharing their knowledge and organising their ideas in

preparation for writing a convincing essay. Students' behaviour is exemplary and the level of racial harmony is exceptional. There have been no exclusions for misbehaviour in the sixth form over the last reporting year. The students' attendance and punctuality are very good.

19. Personal development is also very good. Students play a leading role in the life of the whole school. Their leadership qualities are valued by their younger peers. Many act as house leaders and form prefects, help younger students organise clubs and activities and display their talent with the St. Anne Singers and school productions. The site limits opportunities for physical education but, to their credit, students make good use of confined space. The sixth form students are excellent role models for other students and contribute significantly to the school's academic atmosphere. They make very productive use of their time and are well aware of the importance of their sixth form years.

HOW WELL ARE STUDENTS TAUGHT?

20. The overall quality of teaching in the sixth form is good. Of the lessons seen, teaching was excellent in one in every 14 lessons, very good in one in four, good in around half, satisfactory in one in nine and less than satisfactory in just one lesson seen. Years 12 and 13 are equally well served by teachers who have an extensive knowledge of what they teach. The depth and breadth of the teacher's knowledge is particularly evident in the teaching of mathematics, chemistry, German, English and health and social care. This shows itself in the quality of the teachers' questions and the manner in which they relentlessly pursue justifications for students' views. There is a low tolerance of opinions that are not rooted in good reasons. This leads the students to a critical grasp of the subjects they follow. In the work seen in history, for example, students were adept at judging between different sources and showed considerable sensitivity to questions of reliability and validity in historical research. In health and social care, students are brought to a good grasp of the skills required for marshalling, analysing and synthesising a wide range of evidence. Some excellent teaching in German brings the language to life, weaning the students from dependence on the teacher, encouraging lively discussion in the language while avoiding the use of English at all costs. This leads to very significant gains in the students' confidence in sustaining discussion.
21. Another striking feature of the teaching is the quality of the relationships between the teachers and the students and among the students themselves. The sixth form is a strong, cohesive academic community permeated with a commitment to all that is best in life. The students, in turn, appreciate the accessibility of the teachers and their willingness to help them when they experience difficulties. The recapitulation of what has been learned in the lesson is another strong feature of teaching in the sixth form. This revisiting of key ideas and topics consolidates students' learning and puts them in a good position to extend these ideas in the next lesson. In the best lessons, the way that teachers build on the different levels of understanding is a strength.
22. Teaching is occasionally weakened when teachers do not allow enough opportunities for students to explore ideas, or where the content is at too low a level for students at sixth form level. There are a few occasions, too, when teachers are not fully aware of the different levels at which individual students understand what is taught. Teachers do not encourage students enough to use their skills in information and communication technology to support independent research.

23. Students are good learners. They apply themselves to their studies with considerable earnestness, with the consequence that they make good advances in the acquisition of knowledge and understanding. They use well the good opportunities for private study both in school and at home.

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

24. The school aims to meet the needs and aspirations of individual students. It has expanded its curriculum and the range of academic subjects. It has also added to the students' choices the advanced vocational certificate in education. However, it does not offer the currently more popular courses, such as psychology and sociology, offered by other providers. The sixth form attracts some higher-attaining students who find the courses offered challenging and relevant. There are some lower-attaining students, who have succeeded in meeting the entry requirements at GNVQ and for GCSE, who are unable to continue into the sixth form because of the limited range of courses suited to their needs. There have been some attempts to work with other sixth forms and colleges, but these have not been very successful. The school is currently exploring imaginative ways of linking with other providers of post-16 education.
25. The number of students entering the sixth form has declined in the last two years and the school has to work hard to plan subject combinations around students' requests. High demand for a few subjects further complicates planning. Students are satisfied with their programmes of study, but the majority of subjects end up with low numbers. Post-AS decisions see a further reduction in the size of A-level groups. Although this enables students in small groups to receive more individual attention, it detracts from and constrains learning, especially where interaction and collaboration are integral to the course. This fluctuation in numbers complicates the planning of the use of resources.
26. Mathematics, chemistry, biology and English literature are the most popular subjects at AS Level and at A level. The school, in collaboration with external career advisors, endeavours to guide students in their decision-making at post-16 and post-AS level. Although most students appreciate this advice, a significant minority express some reservations about advice given relating to their current course combinations and career aspirations.
27. All students complete the key skills course, with the consequence that they are confident in meeting the demands of their courses where skills in the application of number, in the use of information technology and in communication are required. The arrangement by which key skills are taught through cross-curricular collaboration and through a single lesson every two weeks over five terms works well. The teaching of the information technology element through a short course in Year 13 provides the students concerned with the right level of skill to support their work. The involvement of students in compiling a portfolio of evidence works well in strengthening their knowledge and skill.
28. There are some good opportunities for students to continue their spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. For example, there are well-organised days focused on religious education, conferences where moral and social issues are discussed and debated, and retreat days where the spiritual dimension is explored. Overall, nevertheless, the range of opportunities for students to engage in courses or activities that extend their horizons beyond the courses they study is limited.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL CARE FOR ITS STUDENTS?

Assessment

29. In many respects, the school's work in developing systems of assessment and ways of using the information gathered to help to guide teaching and learning is good. The analysis of GCSE results, for instance, has helped to guide students towards appropriate courses and give them some useful indications of what they need to do to succeed in different courses in the sixth form. In the sixth form, students are given targets to achieve that are based on accurate analysis of attainment. Though there is regular communication between students and teachers about their targets and what they need to do to improve, many students feel that if their targets were related to A-Level grades, they would have a better understanding of how well they are doing in their subjects. The information given to students about how they are getting on is not sufficiently refined to be as helpful as intended. Indications about where students stand in relation to their predicted grades are not given often enough in subjects.

Advice, support and guidance

30. This is a school where the happiness and well being of students are paramount to all members of staff. This distinctive feature attracts many of the new students to the sixth form and is an important factor in the decision of many Year 11 students to remain. Their parents share this well-deserved view of the sixth form. Overall, the educational and personal support and guidance provided for students are good. The induction for new members of the sixth form is extensive and well planned. Parents value the opportunities they are given to participate in this induction. Students overwhelmingly agree that the school has helped them settle well. The school is aware that there is much competition from other providers of post-16 education in the area. However, while it seeks to attract students it also takes care to ensure that prospective students are making the right choice. Questionnaire results confirm that the great majority of students are satisfied with the choices they have made. Parents and students approve of the small numbers in classes and tutor groups as this ensures that students are well known to members of staff. The head of the sixth form meets formally with small groups of students twice each term in order to share with them their concerns or suggestions. For example, most recently, a problem concerning an overload of homework in one subject arose and was resolved decisively.
31. The quality and accessibility of information and advice for students are sound. Students often get good advice about the planning, organisation and improvement of work. The teachers are generous in the time they give to helping students with their work. Whilst the students value the friendly and positive atmosphere provided by the teachers, they are justified in their concerns that this valuable time needs to be more rigorous and should be used to provide specific guidance to help them overcome difficulties and improve.
32. The personal support provided for students is satisfactory. Form tutors and the heads of year are available along with the school chaplain, the school counsellor, and the nurse who visits the school each week for a one-hour drop-in session. A significant minority of students feels that this is not enough and would like to see a wider range of specialists available.

33. The effectiveness of careers guidance is sound. Across the whole calendar year there are events to provide advice and practical help for students in both Years 12 and 13. These range from interviews, workshops, attendance at a convention concerned with university entrance, outside speakers from industry, and use of the careers library. The vast majority of students value the quality of printed information available to them. Students make regular use of the Internet to secure information about careers and higher education. However, a sizeable minority of students feel they are not well advised about future options. During the inspection students expressed a specific concern about the effectiveness of careers guidance from outside the school. The school is monitoring the views of the students and considering the quality of this provision. This complaint from the students reflects their maturity and their commitment to achieving well.
34. The procedures for monitoring and improving attendance are very good. Registers are monitored carefully, along with the effectiveness of students who pursue their work at home during study leave. The school's efforts in this area support the very good, prompt attendance of the students.

HOW WELL DOES THE SCHOOL WORK IN PARTNERSHIP WITH PARENTS AND STUDENTS?

35. Both students and their parents have very positive views of the school. The induction programme is carefully planned to include new parents fully, as well as those whose daughters have chosen to carry on from Year 11. Parents' subsequent comments and students' evaluation forms indicate very good support for this introduction to the sixth form. Parents are invited to accompany their daughters to the summer interview about course selection. About one in five parents took up this offer, as their daughters had concerns about the most appropriate choice of courses. The results of the inspection questionnaire for all students indicate that a large majority of them are very pleased that their choices suit their talents and aspirations. Nearly all of those who responded to the questionnaire feel that the school helped them to settle well.
36. The small size of the sixth form also receives a high approval rating from students and parents. Students value the very good relationships that exist and the ease with which they can communicate with teachers, heads of years and the director of the sixth form. Parents receive regular updates about the progress of their daughters.

HOW WELL IS THE SCHOOL LED AND MANAGED?

Leadership and management

37. The sixth form is well led in providing the students with a broad educational experience that helps them to attain good standards and to come to know themselves and one another in a supportive moral and spiritual environment. Although its costs are high in relation to the number of students it serves, the sixth form makes a strong contribution to the school's overall educational environment. It is this that convinces staff, governors, parents and students that the sixth form must continue, as there is no equivalent provision in the area. The governors are very alive to the needs of the sixth form and are currently engaged in taking a sharp strategic look at the range of courses offered. They are already planning for adjustments to provision that take account of the potential popularity of some additional courses.

38. Much effort and time are invested in tracking the performance of the sixth form and in analysing the costs and benefits of running courses. Care is taken to ensure that numbers on courses do not fall below an unacceptable minimum. The induction of students to the sixth form is very well managed. What is not so well managed is the guidance and direction given to the students in their work and in reflecting on their careers. It is not that there is little done by way of guidance, but that what is provided is sometimes not sufficiently sharply directed at the needs of individual students, nor is its effectiveness monitored enough.
39. Planning for the development of the sixth form is closely tied to overall planning in the school. This is particularly the case in planning the use of resources. Budgeting is carefully geared to the advantage of all students.

Staffing, accommodation and resources

40. There is a very good range of expertise to teach the courses offered in the sixth form. Teachers work assiduously to keep in touch with current developments in the subjects they teach. In this respect they are well supported by the school. Resources are satisfactory, as is the range of books and materials available in the library, although there are too few books to support more critical work in English. The library is generally used well to support learning. The careers library is particularly well endowed with relevant resources. Information and communication technology is under-used in developing the students' skills in independent research. Sixth form accommodation is satisfactory overall, and good in geography. Limitations in outdoor facilities constrain opportunities for physical education.

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

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

GCE AS level courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	16	94	71	50	32	3.6	
Further mathematics	4	100	N/a	75	N/a	4.0	
Chemistry	24	96	87	54	42	3.4	
Biology	29	90	84	31	34	2.4	
Physics	14	100	86	43	41	2.9	
Full design and technology	5	100	84.6	80	25.3	4.0	
Business studies	9	78	87	33	27	2.2	
Art and design	5	100	88	40	44	3.0	
Theatre studies	6	83	95.8	67	33	3.5	
Geography	9	89	91	89	39	4.1	
History	7	100	94	43	43	3.3	
Religious studies	11	82	92	45	41	3.0	
English language	11	100	94.6	73	36.4	4.4	
English literature	22	100	96	35	36	3.1	
French	6	67	91	0	46	1.2	
German	3	100	92	33	44	3.3	

GCE A level and AVCE courses

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Mathematics	16	100	88.9	44	47.2	6.6	
Chemistry	25	96	91.3	44	48	6.3	
Biology	19	95	87.9	32	37.3	5.9	
Social biology	11	91	88.8	0	30.8	4.4	
Physics	8	100	89	50	44.2	7.0	
Full design and technology	7	100	91.4	43	31.3	6.6	
Business Studies	14	71	89.7	29	30.7	5.0	
AVCE Health and social care	1	N/a	N/a	N/a	N/a	10	
Art and design	6	100	97.3	33	48	7.0	
Music	1	100	86.7	0	41.1	6.0	
Theatre studies	4	100	82.6	25	31.8	5.0	
Geography	11	100	92.6	27	41.3	6.0	
History	12	92	88.9	17	39	4.5	
Religious Studies	1	100	93.2	0	41.3	6.0	
English language	8	100	93.5	0	35.8	4.5	
English literature	15	100	96.0	56	36.0	6.6	
French	3	100	91.3	67	44.5	8.0	
German	3	100	92.8	67	49.2	8.0	
Spanish	4	100	93	75	51.2	8.0	
General studies	17	94	85.2	47	28.6	6.2	

SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

42. The inspection covered the new AS and A2 modules offered by the school, which enable students to study statistics, pure mathematics and mechanics. In the sciences, the inspection focused specifically on chemistry where students reach good standards. Biology and physics were sampled. In these subjects standards were also found to be good.

MATHEMATICS

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

Strengths

- A-level results in recent years have usually been above national averages.
- The standard of work which Year 13 students produce is above average in each of the modules: they are achieving well.
- Teaching is good and develops independent working.
- Relationships with students are very good so that learning becomes a partnership.
- The department is very well managed; good teamwork ensures course planning is challenging and more than meets the new examination requirements.

Areas for improvement

- There is not enough use made of information and communication technology.

Standards and achievement

44. The mathematics department does well for its sixth-form students. Notable features have been the 100 per cent pass rate in most years with almost half of the entry attaining A and B grades. The first set of AS results was very good, with 55 per cent gaining A and B grades and only one of the 20 entries not gaining a grade. These results represent good achievement, given the standards of students when they start the course. Minority ethnic students do well overall.
45. The standard of work seen in lessons and in students' exercise books reflects the standards reached in examinations. The quality of students' written work in Year 13 is above average and better than their oral work. The quality of Year 12 students' work, noticeably lower than in Year 13, is in line with course expectations; however, unlike their older peers, most of these students were for varying amounts of time on the GCSE Intermediate course. Year 13 students are particularly strong in their use of algebra, for example establishing the cartesian equation of a conic section from the parametric form and the locus definition. Year 12 students build quickly on their GCSE algebraic skills and explain confidently how to find the formula for the sum of an arithmetic progression.

Quality of education

46. Teaching is good overall. Teachers have spent a considerable amount of time on research and design for the new AS and A2 modules and this is very much appreciated by the students. Students learn well as a consequence. Lessons are carefully planned with a clear structure and an emphasis on providing real challenges for the students. For example, questions in the form 'Can you remember?', as well as enabling an exchange of ideas, provide building blocks upon which students build. Students use their prior knowledge of functions effectively to develop a simple particular integral for a differential equation. All this is based on teachers' very good knowledge of mathematics and how it is best taught. As a result, students are prepared to think for themselves and become enthusiastic participants in the partnership to extend their mathematical understanding. This was best illustrated when two students worked through their homework in front of the class and the teacher offered timely contributions to add rigour to the solution. Students make considerable efforts to understand the work they are doing and

welcome the opportunities provided by their teachers at the weekly clinic sessions or other occasions when staff make themselves available. Students are not always confident in their use of graphical calculators, nor do they make good enough use of information and communication technology.

Leadership and management

47. The mathematics department is very well managed. The teachers have high expectations and are committed to ensuring that students have a thorough understanding and enjoyment of mathematics. They work effectively as a team, sharing ideas and their knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses. This, together with the detailed analyses of examination data and frequent individual conversations with students, ensures that they continue to achieve well and that the department continues to add value to students' prior attainment. Curricular opportunities are good and improved by the creative use of time and the commitment by the department.

CHEMISTRY

48. Overall, provision in Chemistry is **good**.

Strengths

- The standards achieved by students are good.
- Good teaching leads to good learning.
- Students have a very positive attitude to chemistry.

Areas for improvement

- To feed back test results as grades so that students can follow their progress.
- To extend the opportunities for students to use information and communication technology.
- To give more attention to the presentation and organisation of the lower-attaining students' folders.

Standards and achievement

49. The 2001 A-level results dipped below those of 2000, which were above the national average. The trend in recent years has been one of steady improvement. Furthermore, a good proportion of students in 2001 gained A and B grades. From 1997 to 2000, chemistry results were well above those of other subjects in the school. AS results for 2001 were above the average of other subjects in the school. There are no national AS figures for comparison.
50. Achievement is good overall. Best progress at A level and AS level is made by students with average and above-average GCSE grades. Half the students who start the course with below-average GCSE grades finish with a lower A-level grade than expected. The quality of students' work seen in chemistry folders confirms this. Folders of higher-attaining students are very well organised, with topics separated and important concepts highlighted, which greatly aids learning and revision. In contrast, folders of some lower-attaining students are not well sequenced and some work is incomplete; this militates against easy revision. Work seen in lessons did not show such contrast and all students were making good progress. Student achievement in some higher-order learning skills is good, for example in problem solving and independent learning skills. The development of

students' numeracy skills is very good. Although the department makes efforts to develop students' information and communication technology skills, the number of opportunities to use computers in chemistry is not sufficient.

Quality of education

51. Teaching is good. In all the lessons seen the teaching was at least good and in one quarter it was very good. Teachers' subject knowledge is very secure and this is used to good effect to accelerate students' acquisition of facts and concepts. Stimulating teacher-led debates are a feature of lessons and challenging questions maintain students' interest and concentration. In a lesson on chemical energetics, for example, all students were fully engaged; questions were thought provoking and explanations were inspiring. Lessons move at a good pace, ensuring that learning is productive. Students' understanding of chemistry theory is well supported and reinforced by practical lessons. For example, a class beginning their study of the transition elements was well challenged by an investigation to find the general qualities of these elements from samples provided. Marking is very thorough and inaccuracies are clearly corrected. Marking also gives clear targets for improvement.
52. Students' attitudes to chemistry are excellent. They thoroughly enjoy the subject and feel confident. They report that teachers are very accessible and always willing to give help and advice.

Leadership and management

53. The department is well led and managed. Staffing and resources are good. Learning is well supported by well-qualified technicians. Accommodation is satisfactory. Assessment of students' work is regular, but results are given to students as marks, not as GCE grades, and this makes tracking of progress more difficult. Examination results have been carefully analysed and this has led to a clear plan of action for improvement. Progress has been good since the last inspection.

HUMANITIES

54. The only humanities subjects inspected were geography, which was the central focus of the inspection, and history, which was sampled. Standards in geography were good overall, whilst in history they were satisfactory. In geography, the work revealed a good grasp of key geographical ideas, but the students' knowledge of history was weakened by a lack of refined skills in analysis, though the teaching observed was very good.

GEOGRAPHY

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

Strengths

- Standards on both AS and A-level courses are above average.
- Students are supported well through good monitoring and evaluation of their progress.
- Teaching and learning are good: teachers have good knowledge of their subject and provide many opportunities for independent learning.
- The department is well led and managed.

Areas for improvement

- There are too few students studying for AS level and continuing to A level.
- There is insufficient use of information and communication technology for teaching purposes.
- There are too few opportunities for residential and local fieldwork and the use of visits and visitors.
- There is too much reliance on textbooks in lessons.

Extent of provision.

56. Geography caters for four students at AS level and five students at A level. The retention of students after GCSE and AS level continues to be low despite good examination results.

Standards and achievement

57. Standards overall continue to be high. The most recent results are above national averages at A level and in line with those of girls nationally. Results are average compared with those in other subjects in the school. The AS results in 2001 were good, with 89 per cent of students passing the exam, 55 per cent of these at grade A. These results compare favourably with those in other subjects in the school. Students from minority ethnic backgrounds and lower-attaining students make very good progress at both A level and AS level. Over one-third of the last Year 13 cohort of 11 students chose to read geography at university.

58. The observation of students in lessons and an analysis of their work revealed above-average standards in both the AS and A-level courses. Year 12 students show an increased knowledge and understanding of both physical and human geography. Work related to human issues reflects increasing thought, for example about the social impact of migration and urbanisation. Students' explanations are careful and present an increasingly balanced view. Year 12 begin to use study skills to plan and write extended essays. These skills are well-developed in Year 13, where very good extended essays show evidence of good planning that enables students to use their geographical skills, and a variety of resources to produce thoughtful and well-illustrated work. Students' course work in Year 13 confirms a capacity for independent decision-making in identifying geographical questions and issues, selecting appropriate methods to collect both primary and secondary data, and devising methods of evaluation. The work of all students shows good use of information and communication technology, particularly the Internet, for research purposes throughout the course.

Quality of education

59. Overall, teaching is good. Teachers have a good knowledge of the subject. Lessons are well planned and time management is good. Teachers know their students well and are aware of the students' individual strengths and weaknesses. Assessment is used well to devise strategies for improvement in both teaching and learning. Comments on students' marked work are both supportive and constructive, and opportunities are provided to discuss work both in and out of lessons: this undoubtedly improves extended writing and contributes to examination success. Teaching methods are sound. Lessons are calm and purposeful, although not very stimulating. Much is done to allow independent learning within lessons through opportunities for students to work together or independently. Teachers promote thinking skills through questioning that probes understanding. However, they do not insist sufficiently on extended answers, especially from the higher-attaining students. Although teachers' expectations are high, they do not challenge students excessively. Tasks are, appropriately, within students' capabilities. Local and residential fieldwork are not used sufficiently to support classroom learning, and too much reliance is placed on a single resource: the textbook. Information and communication technology is not used to support teaching.
60. Students are keen to make progress and achieve good results. They work hard in lessons, and their written work indicates that they spend time well on their homework. They enjoy good relationships with their teachers. However, although they say they are confident within the lessons, they show some hesitation in answering questions. Students' oral explanations, particularly in Year 12, do not match the good quality of their written work. Most Year 13 students show greater confidence and provide better explanations. Students are open to receiving the views of both their peers and teachers. They listen well and make good use of advice and guidance. Students help one another and organise seminars, making use of particular expertise within the group. They are self-critical and quick to identify and correct their mistakes. They have confidence in the expertise of their teachers and are appreciative of teachers' efforts on their behalf. Students make a good contribution to lessons in the sharing of ideas and information within each group, and show initiative in the organising of and taking responsibility for their work.

Leadership and management

61. The head of department provides good leadership and sound management. Students' progress is carefully monitored through regular assessments. Targets are set for all students, which are realistic. Students are aware of their targets and their progress towards them is reviewed. Guidance on how to improve their grades at AS and A level is part of every lesson and this care and attention is reflected in their achievement. The progress of students from ethnic minorities is monitored, as is that of the highest and lower-attaining students. Any underachievement is quickly identified and teaching and learning strategies put in place. There are too few opportunities for fieldwork and enrichment through extra-curricular provision.

BUSINESS

62. One lesson was seen in business studies. The students seemed reticent and not very responsive to questions. However, when they did respond, some showed a

good knowledge of key ideas. The students' engagement in analysis and discussion was inhibited by over-direction by the teacher.

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

63. One lesson was seen in the GNVQ health and social care, where students were clearly meeting the demands of the course and building up their grasp of key ideas quickly as result of very good teaching.

VISUAL AND PERFORMING ARTS

64. One lesson was seen in theatre studies. The students were working below the level expected for the sixth form. Teaching was not challenging enough.

ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

65. The focus was on English and German. The inspection of English covered English language and English literature. Amongst the other modern foreign languages, French was sampled. In Year 12, German is the most popular language, attracting seven students; there are four studying Spanish and none currently studying French, although there is a group of three students in Year 13. The good standards reached at AS and A Level in English were reflected in the work seen. In German, the results at A Level in 2001 were above the national average in both the percentage of A-E passes and the percentage of A-B passes. Results at AS level in French in 2001 were below national averages and no student achieved a grade A or B.

ENGLISH

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

Strengths

- Results are above average in AS level English literature and students reach high standards in AS level English language
- Students achieve well in relation to their attainment on joining the courses
- Teaching is consistently good and often very good, and students learn well
- The subject is managed very well

Areas for Improvement

- There are too few opportunities for students to develop skills for independent research through the use of information and communication technology
- Good practice in teaching is not shared enough

Standards and achievement

67. Standards achieved in A-level examinations are broadly in line with national averages. In 2001, English literature results, with nearly three-fifths of the students entered achieving A or B grades, were in line with national averages. Standards over the last three years have fluctuated, but the most recent results indicate an upward trend in attainment. Students did well in the first round of AS examinations. Nearly three-quarters of the eleven students entered for English language gained A or B grades and over a third of the 22 students entered for English literature gained grades in the A-B band. Assessment records show that higher-attaining students achieve as predicted and some lower-attaining students are making better progress than expected.
68. Currently, there are five students taking A-level English language and 19 taking A-level English literature.
69. Standards of work seen in lessons are good in both year groups. In Year 13, students comment perceptively on the texts studied, showing depth of understanding and growing insight. Year 12 students work very well together, exchanging ideas and building their confidence to contribute and focus well on the topics discussed. This reinforces their learning and prepares them well for organising their thoughts when writing essays. For example, through close analysis of the text and sharing their personal responses, AS-level students untangled the triangle of relationships in 'A Street Car Named Desire'. Year 13 students move easily from discussion to debate and reflection, developing good interpersonal skills through their critical analyses of a range of novels, plays and poetry. For example, students examine the poet's use of language to express the conflict between illusion and reality in Philip Larkin's poem 'Faith Healing'.
70. On A-level language courses, students research a range of texts, analysing perceptively the strategies used to communicate with different audiences for a variety of purposes. For example, students investigating different kinds of fictional writing used the terminology of linguistics well to identify the ways in which language is used to excite, entertain and satisfy the appetites of audiences for romantic fiction.

Quality of education

71. Attitudes to learning are very good in all AS and A-level groups. Students are motivated positively by the challenging expectations of their teachers, which encourage enquiry and a good atmosphere for learning. The excellent relationships facilitate learning of high quality in all groups in both years.
72. Teaching on AS and A-level courses is good, often very good and occasionally excellent. Teachers guide students through demanding tasks by helping them to work independently within a structured framework. This skilful teaching provides students with a foundation for learning that equips them well for study after leaving school. For example, students on A-level language courses explore the close relationship between physical development and linguistic development in very young children, plotting the exchanges between parent and child to discover that language acquisition is an interactive process.

73. Students' personal and emotional development is enriched by teachers' skilful intervention during discussions, keeping them on track to tackle ethical and moral issues that arise from literary analysis. For example, students analysing the poetry of Philip Larkin explored the needs of the individual as reflected in the needs of all humanity.
74. Teachers' good subject knowledge evokes an enthusiastic response. Students are involved actively in their own learning. For example, students learn to develop their own style of writing and a sparkle of humour enlivens the essays of some higher-attaining students who, for example, were able to delight in Jane Austin's comic perspective in 'Emma' and 'Pride and Prejudice'. By contrast, a few students are less involved; although well behaved, they do not always take a full part in discussions. They need firmer encouragement to participate so that they can benefit fully from working collaboratively.
75. Teachers' detailed marking ensures that students know how to improve their work and this helps them to evaluate their own progress. Students appreciate the extra help given outside lessons and value highly the availability of teachers for advice and consultation.
76. The quality of the accommodation is conducive to a friendly atmosphere for learning. However, students need more opportunities to develop independent research through the use of information and communication technology. A wider range of books on critical analysis and linguistics is needed in the library to help students keep abreast of more recent developments in these areas. However, the English department houses a good range of alternative resources.

Leadership and management

77. Leadership and management are good. The acting head of department is well supported by her team of committed teachers who have worked collaboratively to improve students' performance in all the AS and A-level level courses. More consistent sharing of good practice is needed now to ensure that all groups of students benefit from the very good teaching observed in some lessons.

GERMAN

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

Strengths

- Attainment in Year 12 is above average, students are making very good progress in their learning and the highest-attaining students are achieving very well in speaking and listening
- Teaching is very good. All the teaching seen was at least good and in one lesson it was outstanding; teachers have high expectations of their students, particularly in relation to understanding the spoken language
- Students make good use of opportunities to use information and communication technology, both in school and at home for purposes of research and to present their work

Areas for improvement

- The range of opportunities for sixth form students to visit Germany and France are limited and there is no opportunity for work experience

Standards and achievement

79. AS-level results in 2001 were high, with some students for the first time achieving the top grades. At A Level in 2001, two-thirds of the students obtained grades A-B, which was well above the national average.

80. The evidence from work seen in Year 12 lessons and in students' files showed that standards are good and are rising. In Year 13, there is only one student and, as she was ill during the inspection, it is not possible to comment on the work in Year 13. All Year 12 students, in relation to their earlier attainment at GCSE, are achieving in line with expectations, and the most able are doing very well. The students have high expectations of themselves and their speaking and listening skills are very well developed. They understand and respond well when they use German. Consequently, teachers are able to conduct lessons entirely in the foreign language. Most students speak confidently and present their ideas and opinions well, often using quite complex structures. A few, however, are less confident and respond less readily to questions. Pronunciation and intonation are good. Despite some basic errors in grammar, the overall standard of the students' written work is good. They communicate quite complex ideas and opinions on a range of themes such as the introduction of the euro. In discussion, most students understand and respond appropriately when talking about issues such as the role and impact of advertising, although a few need prompting and support. Students have good research skills and are confident in using information and communication technology to support their learning, particularly in their navigation of German websites. One of the lessons included a presentation on the euro, based on word-processed handouts of relevant vocabulary.

Quality of education

81. Teaching varies from good to excellent and is very good overall. Both teachers of German have very good subject knowledge. One of them is a native speaker, who has a particularly stimulating style and an excellent rapport with the students. Lessons are very well planned with clear objectives, which are communicated to

students and reviewed at the end of the lesson. The pace of the lessons is good. Teachers have high expectations of the students and are very skilled in getting them to understand and respond to spoken and written German. They plan a good range of activities to simulate the students' interest and ensure the participation of all in the lessons through carefully targeted questions. They assess students' work regularly and give them good feedback on how they can improve. Teachers make good use of up-to-date authentic materials, and they use a stimulating range of resources. Teachers make effective use of the limited accommodation.

82. Students are clearly motivated and stimulated by the study of German. Most are keen to participate in discussions and are confident enough to initiate conversations with a good degree of skill, even on topics that do not naturally excite the imagination, such as the introduction of the euro. When reading in German, students use well their knowledge of vocabulary and grammatical structure to extract the key ideas from the text. They seek help when required and act on the advice given. The highest-attaining students are enthusiastic about their work and often go well beyond the requirements of the tasks and homework set to prepare lively presentations supported by good research and information.

Leadership and management

83. The leadership and management of the department are good. Most teachers in the department specialise in the teaching of one language, although a few, such as the head of department, teach two languages. The two teachers teaching Year 12 German are developing a scheme of work, which identifies clearly what students are expected to learn and how the work is to be assessed. The department has analysed examination results in recent years, although this analysis needs to focus more on the particular strengths of students and the areas where they need to develop. Currently, students have few opportunities to visit France and Germany, although there have been opportunities in the past and the school is planning to provide them in the future.