

# **INSPECTION REPORT**

**HYLANDS SCHOOL**

**Chelmsford**

LEA area: Essex

Unique reference number: 115371

Headteacher: Mr T Mulholland

Reporting inspector: Mr R M Coulthard  
11746

Dates of inspection: 26<sup>th</sup> – 30<sup>th</sup> November 2001

Inspection number: 189323

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

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## INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL

Type of school: Comprehensive

School category: Foundation

Age range of pupils: 11-18

Gender of pupils: Mixed

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Chelmsford  
Essex

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Appropriate authority: Governing Body

Name of chair of governors: Mr R Geary

Date of previous inspection: September 1996

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9053	Vivienne Phillips	Lay inspector		Pupils' attitudes, values and personal development. How well does the school work in partnership with parents?
24142	Sylvia McConville	Team inspector	English	
7541	Helen Hutchings	Team inspector	Mathematics	
2396	Michael Davidson	Team Inspector	Science Equal opportunities	How well does the school care for its pupils?
23880	Olivia Hall	Team inspector	Art and design Special educational needs	
2495	Brian Munden	Team inspector	Design and technology	
22491	Lorraine Small	Team inspector	Information and communication technology	
25073	Stuart Jordan	Team inspector	Geography History	
15075	Bryan Stephens	Team inspector	Modern foreign languages	How well is the school led and managed?
15208	Anthony Briggs	Team inspector	Music	
3726	Maureen Bean	Team inspector	Physical education	How good are curricular and other opportunities?
10761	Patrick Willan	Team inspector	Religious education History – Sixth Form Sociology – Sixth Form	
1503	Terry Browne	Team inspector		
3525	Peter McGregor	Team inspector		
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## **PART A: SUMMARY OF THE REPORT**

### **INFORMATION ABOUT THE SCHOOL**

Hylands is a non-selective 11-18 co-educational school situated on the western outskirts of Chelmsford. It has 921 pupils, with similar numbers of boys and girls. Numbers have risen each year, and the school is now oversubscribed. The sixth form has 114 students, and is smaller than most sixth forms. Pupils attend from the suburban area of west Chelmsford and the rural area which includes the village of Writtle. Very few pupils are from disadvantaged backgrounds. Numbers known to be eligible for free school meals are about average. Most pupils are of white UK heritage. A very small number have English as an additional language. Of these, only one is at an early stage of learning English. There are fourteen Traveller children. The number of pupils with special educational needs is average. Of these, most have dyslexia, moderate learning difficulties or emotional and behavioural difficulties. Seventeen pupils have a statement of special educational need. Although overall attainment on entry has been falling gradually, the current Year 7 intake is of average attainment. The school has Investors in People status.

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

The school provides a good education for its pupils. Standards are above average in Years 9 and 11, and pupils' achievement is good in the main school. In the sixth form, although standards are below average overall, students' achievement is satisfactory in relation to their attainment at the start of Year 12. The teaching is good in the main school and satisfactory in the sixth form. The head and senior staff provide good leadership and are dedicated to raising standards and maintaining an orderly community. The strong commitment to further improvement is supported by thorough planning and an increasing use of data to set targets for pupils. The school gives good value for money.

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

- By the end of Year 9 and Year 11, results are well above average.
- Teaching is good overall in Years 10 and 11.
- Pupils have good attitudes to learning and relationships are good; academic progress and personal development are well monitored and supported.
- The provision for pupils with special educational needs is good and well managed.
- The school is well managed, provides a good environment for learning and for developing pupils' moral and social awareness.

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

- The attitudes and behaviour of the minority of pupils who hold up the learning of others when they are not managed firmly enough.

*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, the headteacher, governors and staff have brought about satisfactory improvement and satisfactorily resolved almost all the issues raised. These include planning in all curriculum areas, and pupils' spoken and written English. The school now collects much data on pupils' progress and is making some good use of it to predict and set targets for individual pupils' attainment in examinations. Information from assessment is used well to guide curriculum planning in some subjects. The use of assessment data is inconsistent among departments, but overall progress in developing its use has been satisfactory. Minor issues relating to child protection and health and safety concerns were swiftly dealt with. In the sixth form, teaching has improved. The curriculum has some limitations, and numbers taking some courses remain very low. The improvement in the sixth form since the last inspection is satisfactory. The curriculum has some limitations and numbers taking some courses remain very low. Overall the sixth form provides satisfactory value for money.

## STANDARDS

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

Performance in:	compared with				Key
	all schools			similar schools	
	1999	2000	2001	2001	
GCSE examinations	B	B	A	A	well above average A above average B average C below average D well below average E
A-levels/AS-levels	D	E	n/a		

The school's results in the national assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well above average. The results have improved each year at a rate above the national average. Results in English and mathematics were well above average, and in science they were above average. In English, girls' results exceeded those of boys by a similar amount to that found nationally. Contrary to the national picture, boys achieved more highly than girls in mathematics. They also did better than girls in science, which reflects the national picture. Compared with similar schools, that is schools with a similar proportion of children known to be eligible for free school meals, results in English at the end of Year 9 were very high, in the top five per cent nationally. Results were well above those of similar schools in mathematics and above those of similar schools in science.

When students enter the school their levels of attainment are average. Standards in mathematics are well above average in Year 9; they are above average in English, science, and ICT, and average in the remainder of subjects. Pupils achieve very well in mathematics, and well in the majority of other subjects. Standards in Year 11 are well above average in ICT; they are above average in English, mathematics, science, art and religious education, and average in design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. Pupils' achievement is good overall. It is very good in ICT, good in English, mathematics and science and satisfactory in the other subjects. Pupils' standards in literacy and numeracy are average.

The trend in GCSE results since the last inspection is of a rise greater than that nationally. Although the 2001 results were well above those for similar schools based on the free school meals measure, the results were average compared to schools in which the pupils had similar results in their Year 9 tests in 1999. However, the results for pupils achieving five or more GCSE passes at A\* to C was well below average compared to schools that had gained similar results in Year 9. The percentage of pupils achieving one or more GCSE passes at A\* to G was very low, that is, in the lowest five percent compared with similar schools. Boys' and girls' results have been above their national averages for the last five years, the girls by a higher margin than the boys. The results for individual subjects varied. Comparing pupils' results in each subject shows that they did relatively well in mathematics, English literature, science, design and technology, French, history and ICT, and less well in art and design, English language, geography and physical education. The school achieved its target for passes at five A\* to C in 2001, but did not quite achieve its targets for passes at A\* to G.

While standards overall have remained well below average in the sixth form since before the previous inspection, students' achievement in relation to their attainment on entry to the courses (as measured by their GCSE results) is satisfactory. Many group sizes are very small and standards vary, reflecting the nature of each group.

## PUPILS' ATTITUDES AND VALUES

Aspect	Comment
Attitudes to the school	Good. Overall, pupils work conscientiously and respond well to lively teaching.

Behaviour, in and out of classrooms	Satisfactory. Most pupils behave well, but a few sometimes become restless and hold up the learning of others. Behaviour around the school is generally good. The rate of exclusions is below average, and there have been no permanent exclusions recently.
Personal development and relationships	Satisfactory. The majority of pupils are tolerant of the views of others and understand the need for self-discipline. In their work, they tend to be reliant on adults rather than show initiative. Relationships between pupils and with staff are good.
Attendance	Satisfactory. Pupils arrive at school and at lessons punctually. There is very little unauthorised absence.

## TEACHING AND LEARNING

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

*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.*

In general, teachers have good subject knowledge. They plan lessons well and are aware of the needs of groups of pupils within a class. Their management of pupils is almost always good. Occasionally, teachers are unsuccessful in keeping a minority of pupils focused on their learning, which slows the pace of work. Pupils with special educational needs are well taught, particularly in English and in small groups when withdrawn from classes. Teaching assistants make a good contribution to these pupils' learning.

Teaching and learning are good overall in English. Teachers are enthusiastic and have good subject knowledge; they focus clearly on success criteria at each level. Good questioning is an important feature of teaching in mathematics. Lessons are well paced and teachers focus carefully on the needs of individual groups within classes. Some teaching could usefully be related more closely to everyday situations. Teaching in science is satisfactory overall but varies between teachers in Years 7 to 11. Some excellent use of scientific resources and intellectually challenging tasks absorb pupils' interest and they sometimes learn very effectively. In some lessons, pupils are not challenged appropriately over the whole range of ability.

Teaching and learning are good in geography, history, ICT and religious education. They are satisfactory in art and design, design and technology, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. Teaching and learning are unsatisfactory in drama. The teaching of literacy is satisfactory across the curriculum, but lacks a consistent approach between subjects. Despite the lack of a policy, the skills of numeracy are satisfactorily taught across the curriculum.

## OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SCHOOL

Aspect	Comment
The quality and range of the curriculum	Satisfactory. The curriculum meets statutory requirements, except for ICT in other subjects in Years 7 to 9 and the teaching of religious education in the sixth form. A good range of sporting and other activities and educational visits supplements the curriculum.
Provision for pupils with special educational needs	Good. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are taught well in English and mathematics, in small withdrawal groups. In Years 10 and 11, the pupils follow carefully-structured courses, and are well supported. Individual support plans are devised to assist pupils who have behavioural problems.
Provision for pupils with English as an additional language	Satisfactory. Visiting specialist teachers make initial assessments, and teaching assistants help pupils in lessons. Subject teachers plan appropriately for their needs.



Provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development	Satisfactory overall, with good opportunities for pupils' moral and cultural development. Personal development is promoted well and carefully monitored, particularly through the effective teamwork of form tutors, heads of year and heads of phase. Pupils do not take part in a daily act of collective worship.
<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
How well the school cares for its pupils	Staff know pupils very well and procedures for ensuring their welfare are a strength. The school makes good use of information from assessment to predict pupils' examination grades and set them targets.
How well the school works in partnership with parents	The school works well in partnership with parents, and they make a good contribution to their children's education. Prompt systems for communicating with parents enable their children's difficulties to be identified and dealt with speedily.

## HOW WELL THE SCHOOL IS LED AND MANAGED

<b>Aspect</b>	<b>Comment</b>
Leadership and management by the headteacher and other key staff	Leadership is good at all levels. The head gives a strong lead in promoting the school's values. Good communications between different levels of management lead to a united approach to achieving the school's priorities.
How well the governors fulfil their responsibilities	Governors are very supportive of the school. Although very well informed about all developments, they do not have a clear enough vision of the longer-term development of the school.
The school's evaluation of its performance	Monitoring and evaluation of teaching have been introduced since the last inspection. This is having a beneficial effect overall, but its impact is inconsistent.
The strategic use of resources	The school manages its resources in an exemplary manner in promoting its educational objectives. The school compares its performance closely with that of other schools to ensure that what it provides is appropriate and that its targets are appropriately challenging.

Staff are suitably qualified for the demands of the present curriculum. Good systems and efficient mentoring ensure that newly qualified teachers and other new staff are effectively inducted. Good opportunities for professional development include joint training sessions with other schools. The high standard of staff development is reflected in the recent award of Investor in People status. Associate (non-teaching) staff are kept well informed about developments in the school. Technical support is adequate except in design and technology. Learning resources are satisfactory; resources for ICT have of late increased significantly. Accommodation is satisfactory. The school seeks to secure the best possible value for all expenditure and applies the principles of best value effectively.

## PARENTS' AND CARERS' VIEWS OF THE SCHOOL

<b>What pleases parents most</b>	<b>What parents would like to see improved</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Their children like school, and make good progress.</li> <li>• The range of extra-curricular activities is good.</li> <li>• Teaching is good; staff have high expectations of the pupils and help them to become mature and responsible.</li> <li>• The school is well led and managed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The amount of homework.</li> <li>• The behaviour of some pupils.</li> <li>• The closeness with which the school works with parents.</li> </ul>

Inspectors agreed almost entirely with the positive views expressed by parents, but felt that on the whole pupils are not sufficiently encouraged to become independent learners. Standards of behaviour are satisfactory overall, although a small amount of unsatisfactory behaviour occurs when the teachers' class management is ineffective.

The inspection found that the school works closely with parents over the academic and personal welfare of pupils. Homework is set appropriately.

## ANNEX: THE SIXTH FORM

## HYLANDS SCHOOL

### INFORMATION ABOUT THE SIXTH FORM

The sixth form has 114 students, 64 in Year 12 and 50 in Year 13. There are more boys than girls in Year 12, but twice as many girls as boys in Year 13. Numbers have been growing gradually. In Year 12, the school offers a wide range of AS and A-level courses. Music and theatre studies are available in conjunction with a neighbouring school. AVCE courses are available in business studies and health and social care. Intermediate GNVQ courses are offered in business and health and social care, and students have opportunities to re-sit GCSE in English and mathematics.

The admission requirement for the sixth form is five GCSE passes at grades A\* to C and slightly lower than this for GNVQ intermediate courses. Between 45 and 50 per cent of pupils stay on into the sixth form each year. The social background of the school's sixth form students is similar to that of those in the main school, but their attainment at the start of Year 12 is well below average because a significant number of higher-attaining students continue their education elsewhere.

### HOW GOOD THE SIXTH FORM IS

The sixth form provides a satisfactory education, although standards as indicated by examination results are well below average. It is cost effective, despite the small numbers of students in some subjects. Religious education is not provided, which is a breach of statutory requirements. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Students receive good guidance and support. Management of the sixth form is good.

#### Strengths

- Good teaching in some subjects, for example mathematics, art, ICT and history.
- Good guidance over students' choice of courses, and almost all students complete their courses.
- Good use of performance data to set academic targets for students.

#### What could be improved

- Students' skills and confidence in learning independently.
- The accommodation and resources for sixth form work, including the library.
- The use of information and communication technology (ICT) within other subjects.
- The provision for religious education.

*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	Good. Standards are average, but achievement is good. Teaching is good. Students receive good support from staff but need more opportunities for independent work and deducing conclusions for themselves.
Biology	Satisfactory. Results improved in 2001 and teaching is satisfactory. Students' achievement is satisfactory. However, students need to develop higher order key skills for advanced work. Laboratory accommodation is unsatisfactory.

English	Good. Teaching is good and students achieve well. Relationships between teachers and students are very good. Library accommodation and stock are inadequate to support wider reading and develop independent learning.
Information and communication technology	Good. Standards are improving and good teaching enables students to achieve well. Students receive a good level of individual support, but they are not familiar enough with course work marking criteria for A-level work.
Art	Satisfactory. Teaching is good and the subject is well led. Higher grades are not being achieved often enough, partly because of single period time allocation and a lack of availability of art rooms outside lessons for students to continue their work.
French	Very good. Teachers' subject knowledge, linguistics skills and teaching are excellent. At present, only one student, who is in Year 13, benefits from this high quality provision.
Geography	Satisfactory. Teachers have good subject knowledge and plan lessons well. Students are well motivated but lack skills for independent learning at this level. Their achievement is satisfactory but attainment is low.
History	Good. Results were well above the national average. Teachers have very good subject knowledge and pupils achieve well. However, students need to develop the skills of debate and argument.
Sociology	Unsatisfactory. The teaching does not reflect the requirements of the current syllabus. The subject lacks effective management. Students need to learn higher order skills of research and critical thinking.

### OTHER ASPECTS OF THE SIXTH FORM

Aspect	Comment
How well students are guided and supported	Well. Students receive good advice about courses. Their progress and welfare are closely monitored. Information from assessment is used well to predict examination grades, but is not used enough to identify specific learning needs.
Effectiveness of the leadership and management of the sixth form	Satisfactory. The sixth form is well organised. Monitoring of teaching is satisfactory. The headteacher and governors work within the limits of present staffing to meet the needs and aspirations of students. Good links are being developed to extend the range of curricular opportunities offered.

### STUDENTS' VIEWS OF THE SIXTH FORM

What students like about the sixth form	What they feel could be improved
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Courses on offer suit their talents and aspirations.</li> <li>• They are well taught and challenged.</li> <li>• They enjoy attending and would recommend it to others.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Guidance for the future is not always helpful.</li> <li>• Assessment is not thorough and information about their progress is not constructive enough.</li> <li>• The school fails to respond to the views of the sixth form</li> <li>• The range of enrichment activities is limited.</li> </ul>

Students were less critical of the sixth form when talked to during the inspection than in the views expressed in the questionnaire completed before the inspection. They were generally appreciative of the work of the school. The inspectors' findings broadly endorsed students' views of the strengths of the sixth form. Inspectors found that the range of enrichment activities is satisfactory and that opportunities for personal development are good. They agree, however, that assessment is not always linked closely enough with specific advice on how students may improve their work. Inspectors found that the school could provide more opportunities for students to work independently, to develop their critical thinking and to exercise responsibility.

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

## **PART B: COMMENTARY**

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

1. In this report, the term “standards” refers to students’ attainment relative to some clear benchmark, such as National Curriculum levels at the end of Year 9 or Year 11. “Above average standards”, for example, means that a higher proportion of students of a particular age are succeeding at or beyond the level set than is the case in the majority of schools. “Achievement” means how well students are doing now in relation to their prior attainment, which is what they could do when they started Year 7 or Year 10.

2. GCSE results have shown improvement over the past five years. In 2001, the results achieved by all students were well above average at GCSE compared with schools nationally. The proportion of students gaining five or more GCSE A\*-C passes, at 53 per cent, was above the national average. The proportions of students gaining five or more A\*-G passes, 90 per cent, and one or more A\*-G grades, 94 per cent, were below the national average. The trend of improvement in GCSE grades is above the national rate. Over the last three years the results of boys and girls have been above the national average. Results for individual subjects varied. Comparing students’ results in each subject shows that they did best in mathematics and less well in art, food technology and physical education.

3. Compared with similar schools in 2001, the proportion of students attaining five or more A\*-C grades was average. The proportion gaining five or more A\*-G grades was average. The proportion gaining one or more A\*-G grades was well below average. These results indicate that the school does well for its students of average and higher attainment, but is less successful with lower-attaining pupils. In 2001, the school achieved its target grades and exceeded by three points its target for an average points score of 42.

4. Standards of work of students in Year 11, as observed in lessons during the inspection and through students’ written work, are well above average in ICT. Standards are above average in English, mathematics, science, art and religious education, and they are average in design and technology, geography, history, modern foreign languages, music and physical education. Students’ achievements are good overall. Pupils’ achievements are very good in ICT, good in English, mathematics and science and satisfactory in the remainder. Where achievement is good, teachers plan well, setting clear objectives and relating work well to examination requirements. They have good subject knowledge and support individual pupils well. Year 11 pupils are making progress and achieving well.

5. Overall, the school’s results in the national assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well above average for all schools and results have shown consistent improvement. The 2001 results were well above average in English and mathematics, and above average in science. In English, girls’ results were better than boys’ by a smaller margin than that seen nationally. Boys’ results are slightly better than girls’ in mathematics and science, with boys attaining slightly higher above their national average than do girls. Compared with similar schools, results at the end of Year 9 are very high in English, that is, in the top five per cent nationally, well above average in mathematics and above average in science.

6. Overall, when students enter the school their levels of attainment are average. The most recent national assessment results at the end of Year 9 indicate that pupils’ achievements are satisfactory overall. Current standards reflect these results. Standards in mathematics, as observed in lessons and through recorded work, are well above average, in English, science, and ICT they are above average, and in the remainder of subjects they are average. Pupils achieve very well in mathematics, and well in the majority of other subjects. This is because teachers use their good subject knowledge to plan the development of appropriate knowledge and skills and prepare pupils well for the tests.

7. In ICT, current standards are above average in Years 7 to 9 and well above in Years 10 and 11. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9 and very well in Years 10 and 11. This is because teachers set challenging and interesting tasks that motivate pupils, and the scheme of work enables pupils to develop a good range of appropriate skills. The recent provision of increased resources for ICT has a beneficial effect on the standards attained.

8. Across the curriculum, the development of students' literacy skills is satisfactory, but inconsistent between departments because the literacy policy is not implemented fully in all subjects. Some subjects focus well on developing subject-specific vocabulary, but opportunities are missed for encouraging different styles of writing. Standards of numeracy are satisfactory across the curriculum. Numeracy skills are well taught in mathematics and used for design purposes and for processing data in subjects such as design and technology and geography.

9. Pupils who are learning English as an additional language make good progress in basic skills and are able to benefit fully from the school's teaching, because they are planned for and supported well. Good planning and support enable pupils who are supported by the Essex Traveller Education Service to make very good progress during the time they are in school. Some pupils have returned to school during the travelling season to take part in national assessments. At present, the school does not monitor results in these tests for groups of pupils other than by gender.

10. Pupils with special education needs make good progress overall in relation to their prior attainment. In Years 7 to 9, pupils are taught in small groups in the special educational needs department. This enables those with lower level reading and comprehension skills to make good progress in the literacy progress units, the partnered reading scheme and in carefully targeted activities in English and mathematics. They are well challenged and make good gains in spelling, comprehension and number skills in well-planned literacy and numeracy activities that interest, motivate and challenge them. Special needs pupils make good progress in developing both their language and their social and collaborative skills in lunchtime and after-school clubs. These provide good opportunities for them to learn to listen, respect each other's thoughts and opinions, share materials and play games to increase their confidence and self-esteem. They are well supported in class by teacher assistants who share good relationships with them. In a Year 7 English lesson, the teacher used very good questioning techniques, to explore the sensitive issue of 'physical impairment', taking as a starting point a character in a class reader. Classroom assistants made a good contribution to developing pupils' learning in this lesson. Gifted and talented pupils are achieving well in science and design and technology, but their achievement is inconsistent across other subjects. Challenging tasks and target setting stimulated pupils in the top Year 9 science set to achieve particularly highly.

## **Sixth Form**

11. While standards overall have remained well below average since before the previous inspection, students' achievement in relation to their attainment on entry to the courses (as measured by their GCSE results) is satisfactory. Almost all the students who wish to continue into higher education gain results which enable them to do so. The small numbers in some groups mean that attainment can vary from year to year, reflecting the make-up of each group. Five subjects in Year 12 have five or fewer students, while in Year 13 the number is eight out of seventeen subjects. Pupils' attainment and achievement are impaired where numbers do not allow for adequate interaction to take place between students as part of the process of learning.

12. Nine subjects were focused on during the inspection. Students are gaining above average standards in ICT and history. Standards are average in mathematics, English and art, while they are below average in biology, geography and sociology. One student is learning French at present and standards are very high.

13. Students' achievement in relation to their attainment on entry to the sixth form is satisfactory overall. It is good in mathematics, ICT, history and English, and satisfactory in biology, art and geography. Students' achievement in ICT represents a considerable improvement on the previous year because more students have followed a GCSE course before attempting AS level. In sociology, achievement is unsatisfactory, because there is no teacher in charge to develop the subject, which was introduced only in 2000.

14. Attainment varied in those subjects which were not a focus for the examination but which were sampled during the inspection. Attainment is above average in chemistry, but evidence indicated that attainment in other subjects is below average.

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

15. Pupils' attitudes to learning are good. Where teaching is lively and work is well thought out and matched to individual strengths and weaknesses, pupils of all ages readily become involved in each activity. They show a mature, highly-motivated approach to their work. When the teaching is stimulating, they become wholly absorbed, as when a teacher sparked a lively discussion on the topical issue of cloning in a Year 9 science lesson. Pupils are very responsive when teachers recognise that they have limited attention spans or gaps in their knowledge, and so use a variety of activities. This was seen in a lively lesson with a Year 8, lower-attaining set, where the teacher introduced a French version of "Simon Says" to consolidate the pupils' knowledge of parts of the body. Pupils are occasionally unresponsive and less interested, usually because the teachers' expectations are lower or their class control is weak.

16. Behaviour is satisfactory in and out of lessons. The majority of pupils behave well, responding very well to good teaching. A few pupils lose interest and become restless when teaching is mundane, or when adults are slow to respond to their needs. In individual lessons, the misbehaviour of a few pupils occasionally spoils other pupils' learning. For example, the attitudes and behaviour of a significant minority of pupils were poor in a Year 11 religious education class in which pupils failed to respond to good teaching and therefore they made unsatisfactory progress. Around the school, pupils behave responsibly. Most noticeable was the impressive tradition of relaxed, friendly and civilised behaviour in the dining hall, which is supervised each day by a senior member of staff, usually the headteacher.

17. Exclusions are rare. The school occasionally uses the process as a last resort to reinforce the point that aggression, or refusal to co-operate with reasonable requests, is unacceptable. There have been no permanent exclusions for several years because the school is strongly committed to making equal provision for all of its pupils and giving them all the chance to do well. Oppressive behaviour is very unusual. The school discourages bullying or racism, and any incidents are dealt with very promptly. Pupils take conspicuous care of those less able to look out for themselves. The thoughtful concern shown to vulnerable pupils with physical disabilities or personal problems is impressive. The narrow corridors and staircases are sometimes very crowded. This sometimes leads to a small amount of jostling and pushing past, which can be intimidating to smaller or more insecure pupils.

18. Pupils' personal development is satisfactory. When given opportunities for taking responsibility, pupils respond well. For example, the pupils who work with the animals in the rural studies centre do so willingly and with great enthusiasm. Relationships between pupils and between pupils and staff are generally good.

19. The majority of pupils can see the effect they have on others and are able to show respect for different points of view, with support from teachers. Occasionally, in lessons some pupils do not show consideration for their classmates and teachers by listening to what they have to say and giving everyone a chance to speak, which can spoil the lesson for others. Pupils have adequate opportunities to work independently, reflect on their own experiences and express their feelings. Overall, however, pupils tend to be dependent on adults to give a firm lead on what to do rather than being encouraged to use their own initiative. As a result they do not always show understanding of people's rights and feelings and the need for self-discipline. In their work, the school does not provide sufficient opportunities for pupils to develop the skills needed for independent research and debate, which are needed for high achievement.

20. Attendance is satisfactory. Although absence rates have risen in the last year, this is because the school is using innovative educational programmes to support several pupils, who go off site for various lessons and experiences. These pupils are recorded as authorised absences, as instructed. Most pupils of all ages come to school regularly and punctually. Truancy is minimal. This is the result of effective

procedures that the school uses systematically to track absences and ensure that attendance levels are high enough to support good levels of achievement for all pupils, including Travellers.

21. Pupils with special educational needs have positive attitudes to study, which are evidenced by their good responses in most lessons. In the special needs room, pupils are keen to learn, take responsibility and organise small equipment for literacy and numeracy lessons. The majority gain confidence through the small group in which they work to improve their speaking skills, organisation and presentation of work. A few pupils with emotional and behavioural difficulties find it hard to understand and follow the school codes of conduct all the time. Their behaviour is good in lessons where imaginative strategies have been used to support them, such as giving them the chance to work with and be supported by others in the class. When there are weaknesses in class management and the pupils do not receive constructive help, their behaviour can be unsatisfactory. Most pupils with special educational needs attend well and arrive at lessons on time. However, there are some inconsistencies in attendance by those pupils in the literacy progress units, and this is having an unfavourable impact on the progress pupils make.

### **Sixth form**

22. Students enjoy the sixth form and have positive attitudes to school life. There is almost no unauthorised absence, and there are few instances of students not completing courses after the settling in period. Attendance is good. Students work conscientiously and, when teaching is stimulating, they rise enthusiastically to the challenges presented. They are co-operative, happy to help each other and willing to contribute to the school community when given the chance. Students have constructive relationships with staff. They get on very well with individual teachers who inspire and support them particularly well, including their head of sixth form. Overall, relationships and personal development are good. Students show good levels of personal responsibility in their approach to sixth form life. Their attitudes develop well. For example, in a Year 13 history lesson, students discussing the nature of democracy and issues about equality showed a growing understanding of moral, social and cultural aspects of history.

23. Students are keen to develop their personal and social skills further. They enjoy participating in stimulating activities outside lessons. They value opportunities that allow them to extend their experiences and learn to be responsible young adults. These include interviews with the elderly, working with younger pupils and taking part in enriching theatre trips, sometimes well outside the local area. Their skills develop steadily. However, students work in a climate of few risks and many controls where they often lack a real voice and active encouragement to use their initiative, to volunteer ideas and to put them into practice. Sometimes, they feel that their suggestions are dismissed without good reason. Students feel that some staff under-estimate their growing maturity and the extent to which they can be trusted.

24. The development of learning skills is unsatisfactory. Students lack the experience and confidence for making independent judgements based on their own evaluation of the ideas presented to them. Too often, they accept what they are told in an unquestioning way. Although they work hard on their own, they are not developing the full range of skills needed for planning their own work, thinking about the issues raised and initiating their own further research to explore these fully. This is because teaching and organisation in school have led students to depend on being told what to do rather than to think for themselves. A few individuals can argue a case very well, with respect for evidence and contrary views. They have a great capacity to work independently and are very receptive to fresh viewpoints. Although there are weaknesses in students' levels of independence, they have positive attitudes and skills that will fit them satisfactorily for higher education and employment.

25. Students think well of the school in general. This is because most sixth formers have picked subjects to study which they enjoy and where, they believe, the teaching is likely to give them good chances of present and future success. They do not think that there is enough precise, well-timed information about how to improve pieces of work and individual grades. Sometimes, this is linked to assumptions that students should not aim far beyond their initial target grade, even where they are



coping well with a new course. Students would like more advice about the options available to them after the sixth form, including the process of finding a job and choosing a university course.

26. In general, students and parents are supportive of the school and pleased with what it achieves. There are minor concerns about the standards reached and quality of teaching and support given in one or two subjects and about information on progress.

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

27. Overall judgements are based the quality of teaching and learning observed during the inspection, together with evidence from a scrutiny of pupils' previously-completed written work. Teaching is good overall. It is satisfactory in Years 7 to 9, where it was judged good or better in about six out of ten lessons observed. In about three out of ten lessons, teaching was very good or excellent. One lesson in eight was unsatisfactory. In Years 10 and 11, teaching is good overall. It was good or better in two-thirds of the lessons observed, and very good or excellent in a quarter. Teaching has improved since the last inspection. The proportion of good teaching has increased, and fewer lessons are unsatisfactory. This improvement in the overall quality of teaching results from the school's focus on improving the effectiveness of classroom methods.

28. Teachers have a good knowledge of their subjects. They plan well and have high expectations of pupils, establishing a good learning environment for them. Teachers have a good understanding of the requirements of the National Curriculum and examinations. They generally manage pupils well.

29. Some very good teaching occurred in most subjects. Key strengths in these lessons were that pupils' learning was carefully and sequentially planned to enable pupils to consolidate their previous learning and build gradually and confidently on it. Interesting tasks extended their knowledge and understanding. Pupils were given appropriate opportunities to work independently for part of these lessons. Towards the end of some well-structured lessons, a review of what had been learned confirmed the progress made. A very good example of teaching of this quality occurred in a Year 10 science lesson on enzymes. Brisk questioning focused pupils' attention on the topic. They were encouraged to predict the best temperature for conducting and experiment to ensure a fair test. This encouraged pupils to develop the enquiry element in science. Suitable resources had been organised, and the teacher's good support of individuals enabled all in the class to make very good gains in their scientific knowledge and understanding.

30. Teachers used questioning effectively in many lessons to recall previous work and to establish a good pace of learning. For example, in a Year 7 English lesson, the teacher enlivened a topic on active and passive verbs with good humour and used her very good relationships with the class to pose challenging questions. She used a whiteboard to martial the information gained through careful questioning so that pupils of all levels of attainment understood the grammatical principles. The very supportive atmosphere meant that the pupils felt secure enough to volunteer thoughts and opinions, which were valued by the teacher. The carefully calculated questioning, sometimes with supplementary questions to challenge pupils further, helped all pupils to learn the rules systematically and to apply them successfully in subsequent work.

31. Teachers challenge pupils well in most lessons, which enables pupils to learn at a good pace. Where pupils are placed in sets, work is at a suitable level for those pupils. In addition, teachers provide good support for those who need additional help. In a Year 11 French top set, where pupils studied the story of Goldilocks, they extended their comprehension of spoken French at a very brisk pace because of the demanding pace of teaching, accentuated by the imposition of tight deadlines. They made very good use of worksheets to consolidate their knowledge of new vocabulary and grammar, gaining obvious enjoyment from the experience.

32. Good subject knowledge and interesting presentation by the teacher motivated pupils effectively in some of the better lessons observed and established a very good pace of learning. Pupils achieved a high level of concentration in a brief but demanding game of 'Countdown', which served as a warm-up

challenge in a mathematics lesson in Year 8. After this, the pupils channelled their obvious enthusiasm into quiet, independent work on co-ordinates. The teacher sustained their pace of learning well by refocusing their attention from time to time, giving them relevant additional information.

33. Marking is satisfactory overall in Years 7 to 9, and good in Years 10 and 11, where it helps pupils' learning by focusing on the needs of individuals and relating them to the requirements of the course. Some teachers give good, informative feedback that enables pupils to know how well they have done and what they need to do to improve. This gives pupils greater insights into their own learning needs. Pupils' response to the best teaching was very good and resulted in high levels of interest and sustained concentration. Some teachers give pupils targets to work towards after assessing their work, which helps them to focus their learning. Marking is better in Years 10 and 11 because it is closely based on examination criteria.

34. Pupils generally behave well in lessons, but occasionally teachers' expectations of pupils' work were not high enough and this led to inattention and unsatisfactory behaviour that was not managed firmly enough. This was seen in lessons that were judged unsatisfactory, and in a few that were satisfactory overall. On other occasions, the teacher did not monitor pupils' progress adequately and so some pupils were not given the help they needed. When these were lower-attaining pupils who did not know how to resolve the problem themselves, it led to a lack of progress in the lesson.

35. Pupils are prepared well for their GCSE examinations, and so they do well. However, some teachers miss opportunities to develop pupils' critical skills and their skills in debating and hypothesising. As a result, pupils tend to rely too heavily on the teacher to organise their learning. For example, opportunities to encourage pupils to conjecture were missed in some mathematics and science lessons, and answers were too quickly given by the teacher. When teachers challenged the class to suggest explanations of their own, the pupils gave thoughtful and imaginative responses. For example, when considering erosion and the effects of glaciers in a geography lesson in Year 10, pupils showed independence and depth of thought in their responses that led to substantial gains in understanding and a very good standard of learning.

36. The teaching of literacy across the curriculum is satisfactory. A good literacy policy exists but it is not implemented consistently across the curriculum. Pupils with significant weaknesses in literacy are identified and given individual support. Some departments focus strongly on subject-specific vocabulary and give useful help with, for example, appropriate styles of writing for answering examination questions. Though not guided by a policy, the teaching of numeracy skills across the curriculum is satisfactory. Basic skills are well taught in mathematics and applied to practical activities in a satisfactory range of subjects.

37. Some subjects make good use of ICT. These include science, English, modern foreign languages, and music. In mathematics, art, design and technology, history and geography and religious education, teachers make too little use of ICT. The use of ICT across the curriculum is therefore unsatisfactory overall.

38. The quality of teaching and learning for pupils with special educational needs is good. Some excellent and very good teaching was observed in English. Sometimes, carefully-targeted teacher support for pupils with a statement of special educational need gradually gives them the confidence to learn more independently, as was observed in an art lesson. Teachers and support assistants generally know their pupils well, and promote very good relationships which help the pupils feel more confident. This was evident in the well-organised programme of partnered reading. In the literacy progress unit, teachers use a very effective range of resources and questioning to stimulate and motivate pupils to increase their vocabulary, organise their thinking and writing skills and give reasons for their responses. Teachers' planning for special education needs pupils is generally good, though some lack of attention to the different levels of attainment was noted in the planning for ICT, design and technology and physical education.

39. Teaching assistants make a valuable contribution to the learning of pupils with special educational needs when they are taught in mainstream classes, in partnered reading and in special needs literacy and numeracy lessons. The teaching assistants have good knowledge and expertise, and manage difficult

pupils sensitively. For example, in a history lesson, a teacher assistant with expertise in positive behaviour management gave good help to an uncooperative pupil, which resulted in that pupil making good progress. Some pupils' behavioural difficulties, poor listening skills and weak learning habits persist into Years 10 and 11. Positive and patient teaching are provided and ensures that these pupils with special educational needs continue to progress. A very good example of this was seen in a Year 11 French lesson, where the teacher set challenging deadlines and supported and encouraged individual pupils very well so that all pupils made very good gains in learning. A judicious use of humour by the teacher was another effective motivating factor.

40. The needs of pupils who are learning English as an additional language are carefully diagnosed and their progress well monitored. The class teacher and learning support assistants plan work for them carefully, and they receive a good level of individual support. Teachers plan carefully for the small number of Travellers in the school, which enables them to make satisfactory progress.

## **Sixth form**

41. Teaching in the sixth form is satisfactory overall. Teaching was good in a majority of the lessons observed during the inspection. This is a good improvement on the findings of the last inspection, when no teaching was judged better than satisfactory. However, students are not taught to develop the advanced study skills that are required for gaining high levels of attainment in sixth form work. These include research skills, the ability to debate and discuss and to evaluate ideas. Students demonstrate too little of the intellectual curiosity that leads to confident and independent study. There is a tendency for learning to depend too much on the direction of the teacher. This is why teaching is satisfactory overall, rather than good.

42. Overall, the quality of learning is satisfactory. When the teacher ensures that all are actively involved in a lesson, their learning is good and sometimes very good. However, students tend to show too little independence and initiative in their learning. Too few pupils venture their own opinions or answers to teachers' questions, unless specifically requested to do so. In an English lesson in Year 12, where the class was studying Shelley's 'Frankenstein', students had acquired a satisfactory understanding of ideas in the text, but their skills in literary criticism were weak, as was their general background knowledge. In a biology lesson in Year 13, students were reluctant to contribute orally, but the tenacity of the teacher and the constant use of carefully-framed questions ensured that by the end of the lesson they had made good gains in knowledge and understanding.

43. As in the main school, teachers have good, and sometimes very good, subject knowledge. They know their students and their needs well. In mathematics, teachers provide well for individual students' needs, enabling each to learn systematically and build on previous knowledge. The good support available in English helped students who needed extra help to make good progress. Data from marking and assessment informs teachers of students' strengths and what they need to focus on learning next. Students are informed of their predicted grades, which motivates them and encourages good learning. Teachers generally make good use of assessment information to match the work to students' needs.

44. In the subjects focused on during the inspection teaching was satisfactory overall. Teaching was very good in French, and good in mathematics, English, ICT, history and art. It was satisfactory in the remainder.

45. Teachers' good knowledge of students enables them to set appropriate expectations for students' work in most subjects. This was notably the case in art, French, history and ICT. Good relationships between teachers and students resulted in a good working ethos in lessons. Teachers use discussion as an important means of developing students' learning. For example, in history students were encouraged to venture their opinions confidently. Good questioning often helped students to recall topics previously covered and to develop their thinking. However, sometimes teachers' expectations are not high enough for students in their written work, which contributes to standards being comparatively low.

46. Thorough planning was a feature in almost all lessons. Clear objectives led to good teaching, as was noted in sociology. Methods were appropriate for all subjects, but too few opportunities were

planned for students to use computers to enhance their learning. In ICT lessons, the good use of resources encouraged students to develop independence in their learning. Resources were appropriate and used to good effect in art. Sometimes work was too demanding in geography, but lively expositions by teachers encouraged students to work with confidence.

47. Students have a good knowledge of how well they are learning and what they need to do to improve because the small size of some groups enables them to receive much individual attention and guidance. However, there is some variation in the quality of marking and its usefulness to students. It is very good in geography. In English, thorough comments take good account of examination criteria, and help students to see how to improve the quality of their essays. Marking is thorough in biology, detailed and helpful in chemistry but unsatisfactory in physics.

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

48. The curriculum for Years 7 to 9 is suitably broad. All the required National Curriculum subjects are taught, plus drama. A good course in personal, social and health education is taught, sometimes in tutor time and also in a rolling programme of occasional lessons. Higher-attaining linguists have the chance to begin Russian and a second modern foreign language in Year 9. Setting arrangements are particularly advantageous in mathematics and French. However, they disadvantage English, where groups are selected and timetabled according to their success in French. English is further disadvantaged by timetabling arrangements which mean that seven classes in Years 7 to 11 are taught by more than one teacher, and this has a detrimental impact on some pupils' learning.

49. In Years 10 and 11, an appropriately wide range of options enables pupils to select from GCSEs in geography, history, Russian, business studies, music, art, drama, ICT, religious education, physical education and child development. ICT is available as a vocational course. Lower-attaining pupils in French are well provided for through the opportunity to work for a Certificate of Achievement instead of GCSE. Work in music is enhanced by the provision of free instrumental lessons for pupils taking the subject at GCSE.

50. The time allocation for subjects is satisfactory except in science, physical education and design and technology. In science, pupils in Years 10 and 11 are allocated less time than the national average. The allocation of a single, hour-long period for food technology is insufficient for pupils to carry out preparation, do a practical activity and clear up adequately.

51. Subject planning is generally satisfactory across the curriculum, with good schemes of work particularly in history and geography. The requirements for ICT are covered well within the taught course. ICT skills are not developed consistently in other subjects, which does not meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Planning for the development of literacy is satisfactory. Although there is no whole-school strategy for how to develop pupils' numeracy skills within subjects, the provision is satisfactory overall, and is very good in geography.

52. Provision for personal, social and health education (PSHE), including sex education and attention to drugs misuse, is good. The policy includes citizenship. The approach to PSHE is well-organised and develops pupils understanding across an appropriate range of topics. A rolling programme of PSHE lessons is arranged throughout the school year, although no lessons were timetabled during the inspection. However, some aspects were observed being covered appropriately in registration periods. Displays in classrooms and around the school provide a stimulating learning environment. They contribute well to the provision for PSHE. For example, a non-smoking theme is reflected in pupils' displays of work. Pupils are encouraged to take responsibility for their personal development through lessons and activities. These include community care, the support of various charities and taking part in activity days.

53. The curriculum is enhanced by good provision for extra-curricular activities. Pupils have the opportunity to be involved in music and drama productions, theatre visits and a wide range of sports, including skiing and camping. The school maintains a rural studies centre, which includes various animals

including goats, sheep and geese. Three calves are reared each year. Volunteer pupils tend the animals keenly, but the centre is not used as a resource on which to base formal training or academic study. However, the volunteers derive a real understanding of the responsibilities of animal husbandry.

54. Curricular provision for special needs pupils with special educational needs is good overall, and very good for pupils in Years 7 to 9. The school has developed a structured programme of literacy and numeracy, to raise the reading, spelling and number skills of younger pupils with very low attainment. This is a significant improvement since the last inspection. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are taught English and mathematics in small sets within the special needs department. A few Year 10 and 11 pupils receive structured study support in the special needs area, to improve their coursework and achieve a higher standard of presentation overall. They take one GCSE less than other pupils, to make time for this provision. Special needs pupils take certificate and GNVQ foundation courses in Years 10 and 11. ICT provision in the special needs area is good and pupils' individual education plans have targets, which are well linked to key skills and are known to pupils, teachers and parents. Gifted and talented pupils are identified on a register. Initiatives to support extension skills are planned, but development is still at an early stage in most curriculum areas.

55. The provision for pupils who speak English as an additional language is satisfactory. Visiting specialist teachers make initial assessments of the pupils' needs, and teaching assistants help them in lessons. The school encourages inclusion of all groups of pupils in extra-curricular activities, such as talent shows and sporting activities.

56. Careers guidance is good. Pupils receive a good level of information about further education and careers. From Year 7, pupils are made aware of the need to consider their futures. The school's careers library and relevant computer programs provide helpful advice. A theatre company contributes to raising pupils' awareness and the Essex Careers and Business Partnership provides practical guidance. In Year 10, pupils complete three weeks of work experience. Careers education received a Recognition of Quality Award in 2001.

57. The provision for pupils' personal, including spiritual, moral, social and cultural development is satisfactory overall. The quality of display in the special needs and library areas effectively enhances students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural learning.

58. The school provides adequately for pupils' spiritual development through a programme of assemblies and by satisfactory use of opportunities that arise in lessons. There is no policy to draw together the strands of personal development, and so spiritual awareness has not had the same priority as promoting social skills and a clear sense of right and wrong. As a result, teachers' planning rarely includes teaching pupils to reflect on their experiences and to think critically about the ideas they express or write down. Even in assembly, the time allowed for thinking and reflecting is minimal. Sometimes teachers keep talking and there is no stillness for pupils to consider what has been said. In tutor periods, there is too little effort to use time well for discussion. Pupils do not organise their own thought for the day, or a meaningful alternative to school assembly. The requirement for a daily act of collective worship is not fulfilled. In the best lessons in art, science and English, awe-inspiring moments are valued. In subjects such as geography and history, good foundations are laid for pupils to develop an understanding of different religious beliefs. A wonderful display of beautifully presented work on fears and superstitions inspired by reading Harry Potter, indicated the very high value put on the contributions of one group of pupils. In other contexts, pupils' experiences and efforts are not celebrated and explored so remarkably.

59. The school's attention to pupils' happiness and self-confidence, regardless of gender and their background circumstances, is a key feature of its work. This results in careful attention to good conduct, co-operation and a sense of community, with a warm and purposeful lead from the headteacher. Pupils' moral and social development are promoted well, through the generally positive example set by staff, and the school's clear code of conduct. In lessons in some subjects, including religious education, pupils have the chance to consider moral and social questions such as those raised by euthanasia and marriage customs. There is scope for more searching debate of a range of similar issues to support greater independence of thought and action from pupils of all ages. Pupils are not given enough carefully-

planned opportunities to extend their self-discipline and use their initiative, both with their work and contributions to school life. They enjoy working together in pairs or groups and usually do so constructively. Occasionally, there are examples of overbearing behaviour that reinforce a sense of “boys will be boys”. These are not matched consistently with encouragement to share feelings and experiences.

60. Overall, the school fosters cultural development satisfactorily through the curriculum. History and geography make strong contributions to cultural awareness, with good work on the Roman Empire, the Plains Indians and living conditions in Brazil. Exchanges with pupils from France, Moscow and China provide those involved with helpful insight into cultural differences. High-quality artwork, including the mural in the foyer inspired by Aboriginal traditions, gives pupils a sense of different artistic heritages. Other subjects make less provision for understanding and valuing the richness and diversity of local and wider societies.

### **Sixth form**

61. The school aims to meet the needs and aspirations of students who choose to stay on into the sixth form. However, the school’s sixth form has not grown since the previous inspection in the way that was hoped, and the low numbers limit the combinations of subjects that can be chosen and therefore also the students’ career options. However, it is possible to take three science subjects. Even when numbers are low, courses are maintained to provide breadth in the curriculum. Currently, courses are provided in English, mathematics, biology, chemistry and physics, French, history, geography, ICT, art, design and technology, economics, media studies and sociology. Courses in music and theatre studies are organised jointly with a nearby school. There are well-established plans to extend this link in future years.

62. To maintain a breadth of curricular provision, some courses run with fewer pupils than are generally needed for appropriate interaction between students at that level. Present provision does not seek to develop adequately in students the range of research and study skills required for high attainment in the sixth form.

63. A few vocational courses are available, and the school plans to extend the provision next year. Currently, ACVE level in business and health and social care and GNVQ intermediate level in business studies and intermediate health and social care are available. A special needs pupil in Year 12 is following an ICT GNVQ course at intermediate level. In Year 12, re-sit courses are available in GCSE English and mathematics. The school provides courses in key skills (communication) and network management.

64. The PSHE programme includes citizenship, and the school has documented where citizenship is covered in A-level subjects. Moral and social issues are also satisfactorily covered in the PSHE programme. Careers education is satisfactory. It includes provision for work experience and community service in Year 12, and visits to providers of higher education. The support for students following the new vocational education and AS level courses is less well planned, as their needs do not fall into the support procedures traditionally offered.

65. Most of the additional activities available to students in the sixth form are linked to the subjects they study. Those who choose courses in English, art, history and geography have good opportunities to extend their awareness of creative, social and cultural factors in what they study. This supports their personal development well. These students have the chance to discuss moral and social issues when they learn about different political or economic systems, or explore texts, such as Henry V and The Tempest. They have valuable opportunities to enjoy theatre visits, in London, Dublin and Stratford and special events, such as poetry workshops with a professional writer. The school offers students the chance to contribute to the school council, sports teams and clubs and to help around the school as part of the senior team. The school provides a good range of extra-curricular activities for pupils as a whole. There are not as many additional opportunities as might be expected for all students in the sixth form to

extend and enrich their experiences. The school does not meet statutory requirements for religious education and collective worship in the sixth form.

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

66. The school has maintained the strengths in the way in which it cares for the pupils, reported at the previous inspection. The arrangements for child protection are sound, and a relatively minor issue raised in connection with this in the previous inspection report was immediately resolved. Two senior members of staff are trained to manage the school's child protection procedures, and a governor has been nominated to monitor their work. Several health and safety matters were raised in the previous report. They have been dealt with satisfactorily. However, there are now concerns about the lack of cleanliness of science laboratories and in food preparation areas in the design and technology department.

67. The school monitors attendance carefully. Staff are assiduous in contacting parents on the first day of their child's absence if the parent fails to make contact. This has helped to ensure a very low rate of unauthorised absence.

68. Good procedures are used for keeping a check on pupils' behaviour and for improving it. The co-ordinators for Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 work closely with their respective teams of year heads and form tutors to provide a well-organised system for supporting pupils whose unsatisfactory behaviour is getting in the way of their academic progress. The school rightly focuses on the work of subject teachers in resolving problems as early as possible in their lessons. Only when concerns about behaviour remain uncorrected is the formal behaviour support system brought into play. At this point, tutor, head of year and key stage co-ordinator design a behaviour support plan for the pupil concerned, when a pupil is placed on one of the four levels of concern. Behaviour targets are agreed with all involved, including the pupil. Parents are informed of this and kept abreast of progress made. Good records are kept of how well the pupil is doing. External agencies are brought into the plan, as needed. This amounts to a well thought-out system that is contributing well to helping to make the school a generally orderly and friendly place where time and effort are usually not drawn away from learning.

69. Similar arrangements come into play for keeping a check on pupils' personal development, and for helping pupils to benefit generally from their time in school. Daily contact with their tutor groups gives tutors opportunities to find out how well they are doing, for example in keeping up with the demands of personal study, especially homework, and in learning about their successes in extra-curricular and out of school sports and cultural events. Tutors receive information about their pupils from subject teachers and so can see when any pupil is not meeting the school's expectations in parts of their curriculum, and then help to plan an effective response to this concern.

70. The school's aim to provide equal access to the curriculum and equal opportunities for all its pupils is achieved in most respects. Pupils are known by the staff as individuals, helped by the pastoral system and the arrangements for keeping a check of their academic progress. Thus, significant lapses in behaviour that get in the way of learning lead to a plan whose aim is to help to ensure that the pupil concerned will quickly settle back to full concentration on lessons. The grouping of pupils from Year 8 upwards in classes where pupils of similar abilities work together helps teachers to match the work to the needs, for example of the pupils with special educational needs. When pupils with special educational needs are withdrawn from mainstream classes for small group work in English and mathematics, care is taken to plan work that coincides with that being taught to their classmates. Sometimes, the strategies used by individual teachers to help pupils with emotional and behaviour needs are not fully effective; pupils waste time and do not benefit as well as they could from the curriculum.

71. Occasionally, not enough is done to provide challenging enough work for higher-attaining pupils. Boys and girls have equal access to the curriculum, as do the pupils from minority ethnic groups and those from Traveller families. Support for Traveller pupils is very good. The school has well-established links with the Essex Travellers Support Team. All staff are well informed about this group of pupils' learning needs through the special educational needs register.

72. Good arrangements are made to ensure that pupils who speak English as an additional language are fully included in all that the school provides for its pupils. Assessment and monitoring of the progress of pupils with English as an additional language is not formalised because of the small numbers of these pupils in school. Assessment on entry is made by visiting specialist teachers, and it has not been necessary to apply for additional funding to support any pupils. Pupils' names and home language are recorded in a section of the special educational needs register. These pupils are supported through the tutor group system. As part of its self-assessment for inclusion, the school is aware of the need to widen its procedures to incorporate pupils from minority ethnic groups rather than the narrower category based on a pupil's home language.

### ***Assessment***

73. The main school has good procedures for assessing pupils' attainment and progress. Pupils' work is assessed well in the core subjects. Pupils commented on the helpful assessment in English. Strengths in science include the very good testing regime and the use of National Curriculum levels. Other subjects, such as modern languages, history and art, also use the level criteria effectively. These subjects make good use of targets when providing support and guidance to pupils.

74. Since the last inspection the school has considerably improved its assessment arrangements through the development of value-added measures, and the use of target setting for curriculum areas as well as pupils. A comprehensive and detailed tracking system records a wide range of pupil performance data. A national commercial scheme provides the school with benchmarks, analyses and targets for the tests in Year 9 and at GCSE and A-level. With these approaches now well established in curriculum areas, the focus is appropriately on enhancing the support for individual pupils in their learning, drawing on assessment information.

75. The use of assessment information to guide planning is satisfactory overall, with some strengths. Very good analyses, for example in modern languages and design and technology, have contributed to developing the curriculum. Extensive analysis, for example in checking the performance of boys and girls, has been part of the very good monitoring of pupils' progress. Although some weaknesses remain in music and in physical education, the effectiveness of assessment continues to improve across the main school.

76. The quality of care and welfare for special needs students is good across the key stages. Students are identified in Year 6 in the primary schools and induction and reassessment in Year 7 is thorough. The Code of Practice stages are effectively reviewed and progress is monitored regularly throughout the key stage. Additional reading assessments are effective and comments are fed back to students and parents. Annual reviews fully meet requirements and attendance of parents at Review meetings is very high. Parents and outside specialists are also involved at all stages of assessment and are effectively involved at annual reviews. The quality of support from external agencies is very good for statements and Action plus pupils in the special needs area, however, the level of consistent positive behaviour management in mainstream subjects is limited, especially where teaching is weak. In the sixth form, the quality of support for a dyslexic pupil is very good.

## **Sixth form**

### ***Assessment***

77. The strengths in the use of assessment, such as value-added measures and target setting, continue in the sixth form. The school's detailed tracking system extends with a major focus on "target minimum grades" as well as teachers' estimated grades for each student. The use of targets in monitoring students' progress is a strength in biology, and is generally satisfactory in other subjects. Sixth form students commented perceptively that assessment was not always focused sharply on their individual needs, especially on how they should build on their prior knowledge, understanding and skills. However, students felt that most work is assessed well and they received clear guidance about how to improve. Inspectors agreed that procedures for assessing students' work are good. The quality of marking varies, and the use of assessment is satisfactory overall.



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

78. The school provides Year 11 pupils with good information about sixth form courses available in the school and elsewhere. Included in this are taster sixth-form lessons, after GCSE examinations are completed. This contributes effectively to the induction of students to their sixth form studies.

79. Good support and guidance are provided to sixth form students. The sixth form co-ordinator and team of tutors maintain a close check on students' academic and personal progress. They meet their tutors each half term for individual discussions. The school is seeking to improve this arrangement by allocating more time to this important activity. Students who fall behind the expected standard are quickly noticed and helped to catch up. Boys and girls are equally well provided for.

80. Within the arrangements made for the minimum grades required for access to the sixth form curriculum, and the largely A-level curriculum, the school provides equality of access and opportunity to all of its sixth form provision. The recent acquisition of computers for sixth form students' use is a particular help to those who do not have ready access to computers at home. But, compared with sixth form students in many other schools, students do not have access to enough resources for independent study, as would be found in a well-stocked school library, and some of the accommodation, for example in art and the sciences, is not well suited to advanced work.

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

81. Parents think that the school is doing a reasonable job and their views of its achievements are broadly positive. They are not wholly convinced that they are fully informed about their children's progress or that the school works closely with them. This is partly because there are instances where concerns about progress are not obvious until it is too late in the year to do anything about them. The organisation for parents' evenings is not particularly helpful for those whose children are unwilling or unable to make appointments on their behalf. The school recognises this. It seeks parents' views actively, as in last year's survey of those with children in the lower part of the school. It is keen to respond to parents in order to sustain an effective working partnership with them. Links with parents are good.

82. The school provides a range of useful information for parents about its work and life in regular newsletters and on websites, such as that managed by the English department. Good arrangements are made for prospective parents to visit the school. The prospectus and governors' report provide the required information, but have not kept pace with the style of presentation and lively content found in comparable schools and are not always easy to read.

83. Reports on pupils' progress vary in quality. The best give a very clear idea of what has been learned and exactly what the individual pupil needs to do to improve results and achievement in specific subjects. In other cases, there is just a general comment about how the pupil has worked in a subject, with little idea of what skills have been developed and the precise targets for the coming term or year. Overall, the quality of information for parents is satisfactory.

84. Students and parents praise those teachers who are quick to spot problems with behaviour, or progress and to work with them actively to bring about a change for the better. A few inconsistencies in the timing and quality of help offered explain some of the reservations expressed on questionnaires about information on progress and constructive advice. There is scope for parents to be more involved with the school, to talk about and share their skills and experiences, and to be consulted about the school's work and planned development. The impact of parents' involvement with the school is satisfactory.

85. The contribution of parents to their children's work and progress is good because families are generally keen to see their children succeed, so co-operate well with systems such as signing diaries and giving reasons for absence. Parents attend meetings and events when invited because they want to

support their children. The school has a thriving parents' association which is active socially and with fund-raising.

86. The school has good relationships with the parents of Traveller pupils. Parents are keen to work with the school to support their children's education.

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

87. The headteacher is an effective leader, who, with the senior management team, has brought about improvements in standards of attainment, teaching and learning since the last inspection. His clear vision for the school is based on enabling pupils to flourish and achieve their best within a safe environment. The school's worthwhile 'guiding values' are well known to all and ensure a common approach to pupils' personal and academic development.

88. The headteacher and other members of the senior management team maintain a high profile around the school, which helps to create and maintain an orderly and caring community. Pupils' good attitudes provide a strong endorsement of the effectiveness of the headteacher's vision for the school's ethos. For example, the dining hall is supervised daily by the headteacher or senior deputy, and provides a civilised, pleasant environment for dining and socialising.

89. The roles of the senior management team are clearly defined and well co-ordinated towards the efficient running and development of the school. Due attention is given to making good use of the strengths of senior managers and to varying their responsibilities from time to time to encourage their own career development.

90. A clear rationale for raising standards involves teachers in collecting data from assessment of pupils' work and using it to guide subsequent planning. Teachers set targets for pupils based on prior attainment. Monitoring of pupils' work is well co-ordinated on a whole-school basis and enables the work of individual pupils and the assessment of each department to be tracked. It enables challenging and realistic targets to be set for GCSE and A-level examinations. The system of academic tutoring, which is currently implemented in the sixth form will shortly be introduced into the main school.

91. Key Stage co-ordinators and heads of larger faculties form a second tier of management. Communications are efficient and they submit to the senior management team ideas on whole-school issues, such as in connection with the recent investigation into reasons for boys' attainment being lower than girls'.

92. The well-planned and co-ordinated line management system ensures good communication between the senior management team and heads of department and subject leaders, who form the third tier of management. In general the leadership at departmental level is good, except in physical education and sociology, where the heads of department do not have sufficient time to lead the subjects effectively since they have additional major commitments in other areas of the school. Some heads of department, for example of English, history, geography, ICT, and modern foreign languages, carry out well their responsibility for routine monitoring of classes as a means of improving the quality of teaching and learning and raising standards. However, this is not consistent throughout the school. Departmental planning is generally good, but not all departmental development plans include clear strategies for raising standards. Leadership and organisation of the special needs department are good; time for managing this provision is restricted by the heavy teaching commitment of the special needs co-ordinator.

93. The thorough system for the performance management of staff, both teaching and non-teaching, is now in its second year. The scheme has the full support of staff, who view it as a natural development from the recent award to the school of Investors in People status. As a matter of course, non-teaching staff are kept well informed about school priorities and developments.

94. The current strategic development plan covers 2001 to 2004. Departmental and whole-school planning are carefully linked. Progress is reviewed annually and the plan updated as needed. Responsibilities are appropriately allocated, but some of the criteria for success are not clearly enough

related to the raising of pupils' standards of attainment. The good range of planned developments contains an appropriate mixture of short and longer-term initiatives.

95. The school fosters equality of opportunity well and good management ensures that all individual and groups of pupils receive their fair educational entitlement. The good statistical data available on pupils enables the school and departments to track underachieving pupils and take appropriate action. For example, the modern languages department has identified that the main underachievement in boys is in the lower sets, and that boys in higher sets sometimes achieve better than girls. Consequently it has developed more appropriate courses with a vocational element for these lower-attaining pupils in Years 10 and 11. A suitably modified curriculum and materials adapted to their individual needs in many subjects are part of the good provision for pupils with special educational needs. They regularly receive well-managed, additional support in lessons. Special needs staff share a high commitment to integrating special needs pupils into mainstream classes. Careful analysis of their individual needs leads to appropriate and well-targeted provision for other groups of pupils, such as those with English as an additional language and children from Traveller families.

96. The governors are caring and highly committed, and several have had a long association with the school. They support the school and its activities enthusiastically. They have a committee structure that enables them to work in partnership with senior staff and which provides them with information about important developments. They are kept well informed about the school's development planning. However, the governors are too dependent on the headteacher for information, and do not sufficiently exercise their responsibility as critical friends in holding the school to account. All governors visit the school once a year, to meet staff and observe teaching. Three governors are linked to specific departments, modern foreign languages, design and technology and special educational needs. Overall the governors' knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of the school is unsatisfactory, and they do not have their own clear vision for the future strategic development of the school. This is especially marked in planning the future of the sixth form, which was a key issue at the last inspection, and remains a crucial area for development. The governing body has not ensured that statutory collective worship takes place on a daily basis throughout the school, or that religious education is taught in the sixth form.

97. Since the previous inspection, the monitoring of teaching as a means of raising standards has been thoroughly established. Line managers and senior staff, including the head, make programmed visits to lessons and give constructive feedback to individual teachers. Standards of teaching have improved since the last inspection, but inconsistencies remain in the quality of planning and organisation of lessons. Teachers' targets for development need more rigour and the best practice in the school is not shared widely enough. However, the shared commitment of staff is well supported by effective management and indicates a good capacity for further development.

98. The school makes good strategic use of its resources and decisions on spending are closely linked to educational priorities. Budgeting is tight, with the appropriate intention of spending the available funds, including specific grants, to benefit the pupils in the school. A social inclusion grant, for example, provided additional staff time to chase-up absent pupils quickly and to manage special programmes for individuals.

99. Financial control and administration are very good. The governors' finance committee has expertise and is fully involved in financial decisions. The most-recent audit report complimented the school's finance department for the quality of its information and records. It also noted that the responsible officer fulfilled a particularly effective role.

100. The school applies the principles of best value very well in its use of resources. To evaluate performance and plan further improvement the school rigorously compares pupils' achievement to that in similar schools. Comparisons with other schools are also made over how the budget is spent. Care is taken in placing competitive contracts for various services, such as catering and those related to the buildings and site. The school makes good use of new technology, especially in tracking pupils' progress and in providing staff with appropriate access to administrative information.

## ***Resources***

101. The match of teachers and support staff to the demands of the curriculum is generally good. Learning support assistants make a good contribution to the progress of pupils who have special educational needs. The arrangements for the induction and mentoring of newly-qualified and newly-appointed teachers are good. New staff have two mentors, to ensure that the staff are thoroughly supported and inducted into the school's practices. The school has close links with two other schools, creating opportunities to share training sessions and allow teacher shadowing within different schools. These links provide good opportunities for teachers to improve their own teaching through encountering fresh examples of good practice.

102. The school is committed to continued professional development for all staff and is proud of its status as an Investor in People. In accordance with IIP principles, the development of staff is an important priority. A thorough programme for staff development is integrated into the school's performance management policy. Close attention is paid to identifying individual teachers' development needs and matching them to whole-school priorities.

103. Learning resources are satisfactory overall, with strengths in mathematics, modern foreign languages, history and geography. Most departments use classroom resources well to support teaching and learning. Resources in ICT, have improved considerably since the last inspection. There is now a very good ratio of computers to pupils. The provision of fifteen laptop computers has given subjects increased access to ICT. However, learning resources in science are not adequate for curricular needs.

104. The school library has improved significantly since the last inspection. It now provides a conducive and welcoming atmosphere within which students can quickly settle to work. It has a good suite of up-to-date computers with access to the Internet. However, the space available for individual work is inadequate and does not encourage pupils to engage in wider reading, for example to support their learning in English. The range of fiction is satisfactory but the non-fiction is dated and does not provide enough interesting and challenging materials to support the curriculum for GCSE.

105. The school's accommodation is satisfactory overall. In history, modern languages, ICT and physical education, the accommodation is good. However, the general state of cleanliness throughout the school is unsatisfactory. For example, there are dirty floors in the sports hall, drama studio and some science laboratories. The condition of food technology rooms is unsatisfactory because work surfaces are deteriorating and are potentially unhygienic. There are some leaking roofs throughout the building. The senior management are aware of the deficiencies and the school has recently secured financial assistance from the local educational authority for a building programme to enhance the science facilities in order to enhance provision, particularly at sixth form level, and replace windows and boilers.

## **Sixth form**

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

106. On a day-to day basis, the sixth form is efficiently organised under the leadership of the sixth form co-ordinator. The rationale for the sixth form is to provide appropriate courses for students who may wish to stay on after GCSE. This is achieved satisfactorily but within constraints of existing staffing levels.

107. Standards of teaching have improved considerably since the previous inspection, when no teaching was better than satisfactory. The substantial majority was good during the current inspection. Overall standards remain well below average, but students' attainment at the end of their time in the sixth form is generally in line with predictions based on their achievements at GCSE. Students' tutors follow their progress closely and students benefit from helpful targets based on previous performance data. This aspect of the sixth form provision is managed well.

108. Overall leadership and management are good, of both pastoral and academic provision. Subjects are satisfactorily led and co-ordinated, except for sociology, where no-one has responsibility for the subject, although teachers' planning of lessons and effectiveness in the classroom are satisfactory.

109. Strategic planning for the future of the sixth form lacks vision, as was the case at the time of the previous inspection. The governors have discharged their responsibilities inadequately in planning further developments. The curriculum remains comparatively narrow and numbers of students have not increased as much as was envisaged. Religious education is not taught, which is a breach of statutory provision. The school has concentrated on academic provision and vocational courses are limited, although there are firm plans to increase this provision next year. A good initiative with a partner school over joint provision for some performing arts courses has been established this term and is providing a worthwhile possibility for extending the breadth of the school's provision.

110. Sixth form funding is carefully organised and, despite the small numbers following some courses, value for money is satisfactory. The further development of the sixth form remains a key issue for attention. The school is aware that the sixth form is being subsidised to a small extent by the main school. However, governors and staff reasonably judge that the opportunities provided are worth the expenditure, and the principles of best value area applied in striving to improve the cost-effectiveness of the sixth form, as encouraged at the time of the last inspection.

### **Resources**

111. Resources are unsatisfactory. Although many subjects have good resources, there are shortages in some specialist areas. Music lacks reference books and musical scores to allow students to research the more theoretical aspects of the A-level course. In science, the budget is insufficient to replace major items of equipment, and some resources are out-of-date. In art, resources are insufficient to meet the range of students' learning needs. The school library provides inadequately for students' independent research, and has too little space for them to work. This is a major deficiency, and is reducing the opportunities for students to develop the independent learning skills they need for success at sixth form level. This has been partially dealt with by increasing the provision for ICT in the sixth form common room.

112. The quality of accommodation within the sixth form has been improved since the last inspection but remains unsatisfactory. The most serious deficiency is the lack of an area of sufficient size where sixth formers can work independently. The new sixth form block has gone some to addressing this problem but still fails to cater fully for the needs of the students. In science, there are no dedicated sixth form laboratories, which has a negative impact on the ethos for advanced work. The art department has no designated sixth-form area for independent study. This restricts the scale of opportunities for creative work and independent work outside timetabled lessons.

## **WHAT SHOULD THE SCHOOL DO TO IMPROVE FURTHER?**

113. In order to improve the quality of education and to raise standards further, the headteacher, staff and governors should:

### **Main School**

- (1) ensure that teachers manage more effectively the conduct in lessons of those pupils who misbehave and hold up the progress of others. (*Paras. 16, 19, 34, 120*)

### **Sixth form**

- (1) seek to increase the number of students and range of courses in the sixth form; (*Paras. 61, 96*)
- (2) raise students' levels of attainment by enabling them to develop advanced study skills by:
  - encouraging higher standards of discussion, debate and evaluation; (*Paras. 41, 141, 154, 170, 189, 222, 254*)
  - increasing opportunities for students to take responsibility for their own work and develop independence; (*Paras. 23, 24, 42, 214, 243*)

- providing research, reading and other resources that challenge sixth form students; (*Paras. 41, 80, 111, 222, 240, 258*)
  - organising accommodation for them that is more conducive to advanced study. (*Paras. 80, 112, 238*)
- (3) meet the statutory requirement for teaching religious education in the sixth form. (*Paras. 65,96*)
114. In addition to the above issues for action, the headteacher, governors and staff may wish to include the following more minor issues in their Action Plan:
- increase the opportunities for using computers across the curriculum; (*Paras. 37, 136, 149, 155, 161, 170, 179, 211, 231*)
  - provide a daily act of collective worship for all pupils. (*Paras. 58, 65, 96*)

## PART C: SCHOOL DATA AND INDICATORS

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

Number of lessons observed	Years 7– 11	116
	Sixth form	37
Number of discussions with staff, governors, other adults and pupils		49

### *Summary of teaching observed during the inspection*

	Excellent	Very good	Good	Satisfactory	Unsatisfactory	Poor	Very Poor
<b>Years 7 – 11</b>							
Number	4	29	40	33	9	1	0
Percentage	3	25	34	28	8	1	0
<b>Sixth form</b>							
Number	1	7	19	10	0	0	0
Percentage	3	19	51	27	0	0	0

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

### *Information about the school's pupils*

<b>Pupils on the school's roll</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils on the school's roll	807	114
Number of full-time pupils known to be eligible for free school meals	117	2

<b>Special educational needs</b>	Y7 – Y11	Sixth form
Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs	16	1
Number of pupils on the school's special educational needs register	98	1

<b>English as an additional language</b>	No of pupils
Number of pupils with English as an additional language	14

<b>Pupil mobility in the last school year</b>	No of pupils
Pupils who joined the school other than at the usual time of first admission	21
Pupils who left the school other than at the usual time of leaving	33

### *Attendance*

#### **Authorised absence**

	%
School data	9.6
National comparative data	8.1

#### **Unauthorised absence**

	%
School data	0.03
National comparative data	1.10

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)***

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 3 for the latest reporting year	2001	76	80	156

National Curriculum Test/Task Results		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	61	63	60
	Girls	75	62	56
	Total	136	125	116
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	87 (72)	80 (77)	74 (64)
	National	64 (63)	66 (65)	66 (59)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	51 (34)	56 (52)	35 (29)
	National	31 (28)	43 (42)	34 (30)

Teachers' Assessments		English	Mathematics	Science
Numbers of pupils at NC level 5 and above	Boys	43	53	54
	Girls	70	57	59
	Total	113	110	113
Percentage of pupils at NC level 5 or above	School	72 (78)	71 (79)	84 (73)
	National	65 (64)	68 (66)	64 (62)
Percentage of pupils at NC level 6 or above	School	35 (47)	46 (49)	40 (34)
	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)***

	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
Number of registered pupils in final year of Key Stage 4 for the latest reporting year	2001	71	71	142

GCSE results		5 or more grades A* to C	5 or more grades A*-G	1 or more grades A*-G
Numbers of pupils achieving the standard specified	Boys	33	63	68
	Girls	42	65	65
	Total	75	128	133
Percentage of pupils achieving the standard specified	School	53 (55)	90 (91)	94 (94)
	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	44.3 (42)
	National	39.0 (39)



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

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

Number of students aged 16, 17 and 18 on roll in January of the latest reporting year who were entered for GCE A-level or AS-level examinations	Year	Boys	Girls	Total
	2000	18 (16)	23 (11)	41

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	10.7 (12.2)	12 (13.5)	11.5 (12.7)	0.0 (4)	n/a (10)	0.0 (7)
National	17.8 (17.7)	18.6 (18.2)	18.2 (17.9)	2.6 (2.7)	2.9 (2.8)	2.7 (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 units and the percentage of those pupils who achieved all those they studied	School	6	83
	National		73.2

### Ethnic background of pupils

	No of pupils
Black – Caribbean heritage	3
Black – African heritage	0
Black – other	4
Indian	3
Pakistani	2
Bangladeshi	5
Chinese	0
White	902
Any other minority ethnic group	2

### Exclusions in the last school year

	Fixed period	Permanent
Black – Caribbean heritage	0	0
Black – African heritage	0	0
Black – other	0	0
Indian	0	0
Pakistani	0	0
Bangladeshi	0	0
Chinese	0	0
White	11	0
Other minority ethnic groups	11	0

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

### Teachers and classes

#### Qualified teachers and classes: Y7 – Y11

Total number of qualified teachers (FTE)	48
Number of pupils per qualified teacher	17.1

#### Education support staff: Y7 – Y11

Total number of education support staff	16
Total aggregate hours worked per week	359

#### Deployment of teachers: Y7 – Y11

### Financial information

Financial year	2000-2001
	£
Total income	2,541,588
Total expenditure	2,539,624
Expenditure per pupil	2,881

Percentage of time teachers spend in contact with classes	76.7
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**Average teaching group size: Y7 – Y11**

Key Stage 3	25.2
Key Stage 4	22.7

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

Balance brought forward from previous year	5,107
Balance carried forward to next year	7,071

### ***Recruitment of teachers***

Number of teachers who left the school during the last two years	11.4
Number of teachers appointed to the school during the last two years	15.5

Total number of vacant teaching posts (FTE)	0
Number of vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of a term or more (FTE)	1.4
Number of unfilled vacancies or vacancies filled by teachers on temporary contract of less than one term (FTE)	0

*FTE means full-time equivalent.*

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

#### **Questionnaire return rate**

Number of questionnaires sent out	1,035
Number of questionnaires returned	198

#### **Percentage of responses in each category**

	Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know
My child likes school.	23	64	10	2	1
My child is making good progress in school.	30	61	6	1	2
Behaviour in the school is good.	14	60	13	4	9
My child gets the right amount of work to do at home.	15	53	21	9	2
The teaching is good.	14	71	7	1	7
I am kept well informed about how my child is getting on.	18	59	16	5	2
I would feel comfortable about approaching the school with questions or a problem.	39	51	8	2	0
The school expects my child to work hard and achieve his or her best.	43	47	6	3	1
The school works closely with parents.	20	49	23	5	3

The school is well led and managed.

The school is helping my child become mature and responsible.

The school provides an interesting range of activities outside lessons.

23	60	9	2	6
24	63	8	2	3
22	63	8	2	5

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

### ENGLISH

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

#### Strengths

- Results in the national tests in Year 9 were well above average in 2001, and pupils do well in GCSE English literature.
- Teachers' good knowledge of the subject enables them to set challenging work.
- Regular and constructive assessment helps pupils understand how to improve their work.
- Students' attitudes to English are generally good.

#### Areas for improvement

- Pupils' drafting and re-editing of their work.
- The attitudes and behaviour of a minority of pupils, who sometimes distract others from learning.

115. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 have risen over the last three years and are significantly higher than reported by the last inspection. In 2001, results were well above the national average, and well above the average for similar schools. Results in English were similar to those in mathematics and better than those in science. Girls did better than boys by a similar margin to that found nationally. Teacher assessments were not as high as the tests, especially for the boys, who tend to gain higher results under timed conditions.

116. The evidence of written work and the lessons observed showed that attainment is above average and that pupils are likely to attain similar standards to last year at the end of the current Year 9 because teachers prepare them well for the assessments. Standards are now higher than at the time of the last inspection because teaching and curriculum planning have improved considerably. Pupils are generally confident speakers in response to the good oral sessions led by the teachers, though only the higher-attaining pupils have the confidence to present sustained arguments to the class in ways that are more formal. Most pupils read fluently, with regular opportunities in class to read aloud and by themselves. Through their reading, they develop an appreciation of a good range of literature. A good range of activities enables them to write competently and often very well in a good range of styles and audiences.

117. Pupils achieve well in Years 7 to 9, in relation to their average attainment at the start of Year 7. For example, weak readers are quickly identified by tests in Year 7 and provided with appropriate support. Difficulties in spelling, punctuation and organisation affect the quality of some pupils' written work, though more attention to improving literacy is improving standards in writing from Year 7. By Year 8, pupils encounter more challenging tasks, especially in literature. For example, a class studying the life and times of Shakespeare looked at the story and a few lines from 'Hamlet'. They successfully reflected on symbolism in the scene where Hamlet meets his father as a ghost, helped by clearly-focused and knowledgeable teaching. Year 9 pupils cope well with challenging writing tasks. For example, pupils studying the book 'Kit's Wilderness' discussed the impact of good and evil and the inner feelings of the characters, in a mature way. In this lesson, the teacher's emphasis on drafting and refining gave good guidance to the class and some pupils swapped books to act as 'critical readers' for their neighbours. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress because of the valuable help they are given.

118. GCSE English language results in 2001 were similar overall to those attained nationally. The proportion of pupils gaining the highest grades has remained the same for the last three years. However, there has been a marked improvement in the overall results, with all students gaining grade G or better and fewer gaining the lowest grades. Results in GCSE English literature were slightly above average in 2001. A much higher proportion of the year group was entered than is the case nationally, and so overall the results are better than average. Girls outperform boys, as nationally, especially in literature. Boys and girls do relatively less well in English than in their other subjects, but better in English literature. There has been a significant improvement since the last inspection, when results in both examinations were below the national average.

119. The standard of work attained by Year 11 pupils is above average, with a particular strength in their work in literature. Achievement is good in Years 10 and 11. Pupils tackle literature confidently because of good teaching. The emphasis on oral work, with teachers leading class discussions and asking rigorous questions, enables the pupils to understand complex ideas. Pupils contrast poems and stories well, skilfully identifying points of similarity and difference and drawing well on quotation to support their views. For example, high-attaining pupils' written work comparing the stereotype of women found in stories by Thomas Hardy and Robert Swindells, showed a high level of understanding and skill in handling literary criticism. Lower-attaining pupils have a good understanding of character and plot, as was shown by work on 'Macbeth' which included a beautifully presented theatre programme. Most pupils present their work well, though there is a lack of consistency between classes in neatness of handwriting. Some pupils do not draft and edit their work effectively to produce finished writing that is their best.

120. The quality of teaching and learning is good. Teachers' knowledge of literature and their enthusiasm for it are strengths. The emphasis on literature is evident in the detailed schemes of work, and has reaped rewards in GCSE English literature. However, it has resulted in too little focus on other areas of language and media, and contributed to the English results being lower than those for English literature. Teachers' understanding of and sensitivity to their pupils is very apparent. They place a high value on building pupils' self esteem. Pupils' attitudes to English are generally good, but the behaviour of a minority of pupils in some lessons sometimes distracts the class and limits the progress being made. Higher-attaining pupils respond well when given opportunities for independent working, though average and lower-attaining pupils tend to rely too heavily on their teachers. The best marking is particularly helpful because it includes clear targets for next time. Pupils know how well they are doing against national criteria because of regular assessments, and are set individual targets which help them know what to focus on next in their learning. The use of many small exercise books, especially in Years 10 and 11, makes for inconsistency between classes and makes it difficult to keep track of students' work. This is overcome in part by the good teaching and experience of individual members of the department. The small amount of unsatisfactory teaching resulted from a lack of experience in behaviour management.

121. The management of the department is very good, and is helping to raise standards. The standard of documentation is high, and provides good support for the less experienced teachers in the department. Classroom assistants are well deployed and offer valuable support to pupils' learning. Teaching is effectively monitored and teachers receive good guidance which is helping to raise standards of attainment. Very good extra-curricular opportunities are provided, including competition entries, a creative writing club, theatre visits and the department's own web site. Classrooms offer lively displays of pupils' work. In Year 8, leather pouches of spells, based on the Harry Potter stories, and booklets on 'Beowulf', beautifully written and presented by Year 7 pupils, are exceptional. The use of ICT is increasing and is satisfactory, well supported by a trolley of laptops to supplement the computers in the library and in ICT rooms. Computer skills learned through English count towards a Certificate of Achievement for some pupils in Year 11 as an alternative to the GCSE course in computer studies.

122. Improvement since the last inspection is very good. Standards have risen significantly and teaching is now good. All weaknesses identified then have been overcome. The teachers work as a committed team with a range of specialisms, and this is a big improvement since the last inspection. Staff share a strong vision, and the capacity of the department to improve further is very good.

123. The teaching of literacy across the curriculum is satisfactory. Pupils with significant weaknesses in reading and writing receive good support. The provision for developing pupils' skills is good in several subjects, including geography, ICT and modern foreign languages. In history, a whole-department approach to explaining subject vocabulary operates to encourage pupils to use appropriate historical terms. In Years 10 and 11, specimen answers for GCSE papers are provided to help pupils express their answers in a good literary style. The school literacy policy is good but not implemented consistently within and between departments. The use of subject-specific language is not focused on explicitly enough, and teachers miss opportunities to encourage different types of reading and writing.

## Drama

124. Drama is now taught within the performing arts faculty. GCSE results have been below average for the last three years, although they were closer to average in 2001 than in 2000. Standards in lessons and written work were in line with expectations, and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. For example, Year 9 pupils use a limited range of drama techniques but most can sustain a role in character. Some pupils in Years 10 and 11 convey abstract concepts such as 'conflict and resolution' convincingly, although some pupils' portrayals lack confidence.

125. Teaching and learning are satisfactory. Subject expertise is satisfactory overall, and sometimes good, but management of pupils is occasionally unsatisfactory and leads to inefficient learning. Attainment in drama is lower than at the time of the previous inspection and development since that time has been unsatisfactory. The development plan offers appropriate action for improvement, but the current lack of a complete scheme of work is preventing the systematic development of the subject.

## MATHEMATICS

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

### Strengths

- Pupils do well in mathematics, and results are well above average.
- The work is well planned and taught effectively.
- Pupils are motivated and work hard, responding well to the departments' high expectations of their effort and behaviour.
- Assessment information is used well, to help pupils improve and to adapt the curriculum to their needs.

### Areas for improvement

- The opportunities for pupils to explore mathematics in everyday contexts.
- The use of ICT in lessons.

127. Results in the national tests at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were well above the national average and well above the average for similar schools. Overall, girls and boys perform equally well, though with variation from year to year. In 2001 boys' performance was significantly better than that of girls. The test results have improved consistently since the last inspection.

128. The work seen during the inspection in Year 9 reflected the national test results. The proportion of pupils who, on arrival at the school in Year 7, have attained the standard expected for their age is average. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 achieve very well in relation to their entry levels. The work in exercise books shows that they acquire skills methodically in arithmetic, algebra, geometry and data handling. For example, higher-attaining pupils in Year 9 understood the complexities of the volume of regular and non-regular containers and converted quickly and accurately between different units of volume and between the units of capacity and volume. In their work on volume, lower-attaining Year 9 pupils quoted the appropriate units for the capacity of a variety of containers in both the metric and imperial systems. Pupils develop their numeracy skills systematically. For example, average-attaining Year 7 pupils making estimates of two- and three-digit calculations were able to rationalise the reasons for their answers, and understood the principles of rounding up or down. In Year 8, average- and higher-attaining pupils have developed a basic understanding of the order of rotational symmetry, in their work on translation and the rotational symmetry of a range of shapes.

129. GCSE results are well above the national average and have improved consistently since the last inspection. In 2000, pupils achieved particularly well in the highest grades (A\*, A and B). These results were maintained in 2001. Overall, girls performed better than boys by an average of half a grade, but the performance of both is significantly above the national averages and similar to the national difference between girls' and boys' results. Almost all pupils are entered for GCSE, and very few do not achieve a grade G or better.

130. Standards in Year 11 are above average, and pupils' achievement is good in Years 10 and 11. The pupils are very well prepared for the examination, which is why the results are higher than the standard of work seen in Year 11. Work is planned well for pupils to make the transition to GCSE work. For example, the work in their exercise books shows a short introductory revision of the topics covered in Year 9, before moving on to new learning. Pupils' attainment is checked so that each is given work at the most appropriate levels of the National Curriculum. For example, high-attaining pupils in Year 10 developed their understanding of similar shapes and how to calculate the sizes of different sides, while lower-attaining pupils in other classes made good progress in accurately drawing bearings from the north, using both 180 degree and 360 degree protractors. Pupils in Year 11 confidently used principles of measurement to gain accurate results in working out the radius of the earth and one hour as a proportion of a year. Because the work is adapted well to their needs, most pupils have confidence in the work they tackle.

131. Teaching and learning are good. This is an improvement since the last inspection. Teachers are well qualified and experienced. Their good knowledge of their pupils enables them to set work based carefully on what the pupils need to learn next. This is particularly evident within the lower-attaining sets, where the work interests the pupils and so their levels of industry and achievement are impressive. Teachers pace lessons well. This is particularly evident in Years 7 to 9, helped by the effective implementation of the National Numeracy Strategy. Skills and techniques are taught and practised effectively. Gifted and talented pupils have opportunities to enter national mathematics competitions, but the provision of similarly challenging work during lessons is not frequent enough. For example, a few pupils spend too long practising work that they can already do, before moving on the more challenging extension activities. Pupils with identified special educational needs receive good support from teacher assistants and so make good progress. Teachers provide very clear and precise explanations, and so pupils undertake their tasks confidently. In the best lessons observed, good questioning enabled pupils to develop their understanding quickly. Very careful marking, particularly of homework, gives pupils a secure record of accurate work. Homework generally extends work that has been started in lessons and helps pupils to develop their skills and understanding.

132. Teachers make good use of the range of assessment information available, to help pupils' learning and to improve the curriculum. For example, end-of-unit tests are used to decide which topics need revision and to monitor the progress of individual pupils. The information also enables pupils to monitor their own progress. Pupil profile booklets help them review which aspects of the course they have covered successfully.

133. Pupils meet the department's expectations of high standards of behaviour and work. They answer questions willingly when asked. When there is something that they have not understood, many pupils have the confidence to question their teacher in a mature manner. Pupils sustain high levels of concentration for a long time. They take a great pride in their work, and organise and present it well. Pupils' relationships with their teachers are very good and they feel valued. For example, when pupils return after a period of absence, they are brought back into the work quickly and enabled to make up missed work with a minimum of fuss.

134. A relative weakness in teaching relates to the provision of real contexts and an everyday practical approach for pupils' learning, to challenge pupils to think about mathematics in a broader sense than envisaged by the textbook. For example, when Year 9 pupils were studying volume, this was done mainly through the study of abstract ideas and they were given only specialist mathematical cubes as a practical tool. Many pupils would have developed their understanding more quickly through the use of everyday objects and practical examples. The main opportunities for pupils to investigate mathematical problems, follow a line of enquiry and reach conclusions are through formal investigational topics. Also, pupils are not regularly required to explain their ideas, either to one another or to the whole class, to develop their thinking and their use of mathematical language. Sometimes, teachers do not review the work at the end of lessons in Years 10 and 11, missing the opportunity to consolidate learning.

135. Numeracy skills are satisfactorily taught and developed in subjects other than mathematics. For example, pupils represent data in a variety of contexts in science. Design and technology lessons provide pupils with many opportunities to apply their numeracy skills in a variety of contexts, for example to

measure ingredients in food, to calculate component values in electronics and to develop their understanding in three-dimensions by designing packages. In art, Year 7 pupils enjoyed working out mental problems using Chinese characters, and in a Russian lesson Year 10 pupils developed their confidence in learning Russian numbers through the use of basic mental arithmetic. The scrutiny of work in geography showed progression in the use of numeracy, through activities in which pupils collect and interpret data and use a variety of graphs and charts.

136. Overall, the improvement in mathematics since the last inspection is good. The department is well managed and organised. All aspects of the National Curriculum are covered, although too little use is made of ICT. Pupils do not have ready access to computers to support their work during lessons, apart from some topics in which their use is specially planned. Software has recently been purchased to increase the use of ICT, but it has yet to be added to the school network. Some pupils in Year 11 use computer skills developed through mathematics to gain a Certificate of Achievement as an alternative to GCSE in computer studies. Good use is made of graphic calculators throughout the school. Monitoring of pupils' work is good. Pupils receive constructive guidance individually on how they may improve their work. Monitoring of mathematics by the senior management team has provided a useful analysis of the department's strengths and weaknesses, which effectively guides the planning of the subject's development. However, mathematics teachers have too few opportunities to observe the work of their peers other than informally, and the best practice in teaching is not shared in an organised way.

## SCIENCE

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

### Strengths

- Standards achieved in GCSE examinations
- The quality of teaching
- The check kept of pupils' progress and the use of targets to encourage them to do their best
- Some excellent use of information and communication technology
- Leadership by the head of department

### Areas for improvement

- Some unsatisfactory teaching, together with weaknesses in the marking of pupils' work and insufficient attention to teaching scientific enquiry well
- Shortage of resources

137. In 2000, the results gained by Year 9 pupils in the national tests were in line with the national average for all schools and well above the average for similar schools. Pupils did not achieve as well in science as in English and mathematics. Over the past three years, boys and girls have done equally well in science, compared to the national picture. The trend of improvement, overall, is similar to the national trend. In 2001, Year 9 pupils reached above average results, and did well compared to their attainments when they started at the school in Year 7, but standards were lower than in English and mathematics. The Year 11 GCSE double award science results in 2000 were significantly above the national average for grades A\* to C, and all pupils entered for that examination passed. Pupils did better in science than in their other subjects taken together. Girls did comparatively better than boys. In 2001, results were similarly good. Passes at the top grades have improved each year during the past three years. Too few pupils were entered for GCSE single award for meaningful comparisons to be made.

138. When pupils join the school in Year 7, their overall attainment is average. Pupils in the present Year 9 are, overall, reaching above average standards, showing that they have achieved well since joining the school. They are on track to reach higher standards than those shown by the 2001 national tests. While there are variations in achievement between classes, due to differences in the quality of teaching, pupils in Years 10 and 11 continue to achieve well in relation to their previous learning. Pupils in the present Year 11 are on course to gain results in line with the GCSE results of the past two years when standards were significantly above the national average. Where teaching is good or better, pupils'



knowledge, skills and understanding are developing at a similar rate. Elsewhere, due to some weaknesses in teaching, achievement in skills and understanding is not as good as in knowledge of science. Boys and girls generally make similar progress. However, in classes where pupils' learning is not particularly well managed, boys are sometimes allowed to dominate during question and answer sessions, thereby inhibiting girls' progress. In some classes, not enough attention is given to meeting the needs of pupils with different abilities, particularly the most able. These pupils are not always given enough challenging work to do, and so do not progress as well as they could. Pupils with special educational needs progress satisfactorily overall, with good progress in classes where the quality of teaching is best. Pupils from minority ethnic groups progress as well as do other pupils.

139. In Year 7, the pupils show good understanding of the expected areas of learning. They know, for example, about the structure of matter and how to separate substances. The importance of predicting outcomes to experiments before carrying them out is appreciated. By Year 9 pupils have an understanding of the impact of smoking on the breathing system and technical language such as ciliated epithelial cells, is used well. Fifteen and sixteen-year-olds understand the importance of temperature on the function of enzymes. They balance chemical equations and know how particle size affects the rate of a chemical reaction. Practical skills improve as pupils progress through the school but there is a tendency to learn rather than understand. For example, results of an experiment concerning ohms law were tabulated accurately, but pupils lacked understanding of current and voltage. Pupils are not sufficiently skilled in carrying out investigations.

140. The teaching observed during the inspection, judged by how well it helped pupils to learn and make progress, ranged from unsatisfactory to excellent. It was satisfactory overall, with little variation between the teaching of pupils in Years 7 to 9 and those studying for GCSE. Strengths in teaching include high expectations of what all pupils in the class should be able to achieve, as seen in a Year 9 lesson, where the most able pupils in the year were studying the earth in space. Here, the excellent resources, including information and communication technology, and intellectually stimulating activities enabled all pupils to progress very well in their understanding of science, their skills in carrying out and recording scientific enquiries and in their attitudes to learning science. Pupils were totally absorbed in their work, made excellent use of the hour-long lesson and behaved almost impeccably. Other lessons where teaching was good or very good, and to a lesser extent where it was satisfactory, shared some of these features. In addition, in the best teaching, lessons began with sharp questioning to test pupils' understanding of earlier work, a good range of learning activities was planned for pupils that held their interest, and lessons finished with review of what should have been learnt. These lessons were taught in a friendly, yet businesslike, way that ensured that all pupils remained focused on learning. Pupils' behaviour was very well managed so that little or no time was wasted.

141. Weaknesses in teaching, which result in pupils not learning as well as they could, include lack of attention to the needs of all the pupils in the class. In particular, this results in more able pupils sometimes marking time as they have to wait for others to catch up. In some lessons, teaching was not effective in gaining the full attention of pupils, so they did not learn enough. In these lessons, the management of pupils' behaviour was ineffective. Some lessons finished with insufficient effort made through questioning to find out if pupils had learnt enough or to make clear links with the next stage of learning, including homework. A further weakness, which delays the development of pupils' skills and understanding, is the inconsistent focus in some teaching on developing the skills of scientific enquiry. In these instances, which show through in pupils' written work as well, practical work does not sufficiently engage pupils in developing and testing hypotheses. While some marking of pupils' work is exemplary, in that it is detailed and helpful for their further improvement, much is superficial. This weak marking provides little guidance for pupils on how well they are doing and what they should do to improve. A weakness that undermines teaching and learning is shortage of resources or dated resources. In some lessons, large groups of pupils had to share too few resources and in others the resources look dated. However, in other lessons, because of the topic being taught, for example a Year 8 lesson on chemical formulae, a good range of resources was assembled.

142. The department is making some excellent use of ICT, including laptops. At best, this is exemplary and makes a significant contribution to pupils' learning. A good range of computer applications is

incorporated into science, including data logging, research, word-processing and spreadsheets. The grant for ICT resources received a few years ago is being used to good effect, though there are still insufficient laptops and desktop computers for use by a full class at the same time.

143. The head of department exercises strong leadership. Management is not so well developed, as shown by the inconsistencies in the quality of teaching in the department. Not enough has been done to improving teaching that is unsatisfactory, as well as those aspects of otherwise satisfactory teaching, such as weaknesses in marking, that prevent pupils in some classes from learning as well as they could. In other respects, management has been more successful in bringing about improvement, particularly in raising standards in GCSE and the careful checking of pupils' progress. Overall, improvement since the previous inspection has been satisfactory. For the future, in addition to improving unsatisfactory teaching, shortages in resources need remedying. The laboratories, which are dirty, and cluttered in some instances, need to be made into more suitable environments for learning and teaching. Science is allocated less than the national average time in Year 10, amounting to a reduction of one in every ten lessons over the two-year GCSE course. This is unhelpful in the departments' work to improve standards further.

## ART AND DESIGN

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

### Strengths

- Current standards are above average in Years 10 and 11
- Good teaching is characterised by challenging activities and a close study of artists' styles
- The stimulating learning environment motivates pupils well
- Good contribution to pupils' multicultural awareness

### Areas for improvement

- The achievement of boys, particularly in Years 10 and 11, so that they do better at GCSE
- The consistency of teaching in Years 7 to 9
- The use of ICT in art
- Monitoring the quality of teaching, to identify and deal with areas of weakness

144. In 2001, the results of Year 9 teacher assessments were well above the expected standard (level 5 or above). However, these results are higher than the above average standard of work seen during the inspection, indicating that the teacher assessments were an over-estimate. Pupils' achievement is good. The majority of pupils make good use of a range of materials such as paint, mixed media and collage, and by the end of Year 9 show good levels of competence in using these to investigate, explore and develop ideas. Year 9 pupils have worked on the conventions of Surrealist artists, to produce studies based on illusion. They have use Magritte's motifs and painting techniques successfully in their own compositions, to extend their imagination and ideas. Overall, standards in painting are higher than in drawing. Pupils show average standards of planning, and in mixing and controlling paint. Most use sketchbooks imaginatively to prepare projects, but this is inconsistent. Drawing skills for higher-attaining pupils are good whereas their recording skills are satisfactory overall. Many average- and lower-attaining pupils have a weak understanding of tone, shape and form because they draw from pictures and magazines rather than direct observation. Most pupils have the opportunity to work with three-dimensional materials, but skills of modelling are at an elementary stage and pupils' knowledge of tactile exploration is limited. Pupils with special needs are achieving well because they receive good support from teachers, helping them to work independently.

145. GCSE results have been maintained at average or above since the last inspection, except in 2001 when they were below average. Girls have consistently done better than boys in the last three years, with above-average scores in 1999 and 2000. The highest-attaining pupils did well in gaining A and B grades in 2001, but the proportion of C grades halved, giving rise to results which were lower than expected. The majority of pupils gained grade G or better, but a few boys did not complete the examination.

146. The evidence of pupils' work and the lessons observed showed that standards are now above average and pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is good. Displays of GCSE coursework show a developing confidence in the use of colour, extending pupils insight and giving them confidence to communicate their own visual ideas. The majority of Year 11 pupils work from direct observation and imagination with increasing confidence, as they re-visit themes from Year 10. The opportunity to draw from a life model is improving the quality of line and tone in their studies. Pupils respond readily to new ideas, experiment with a range of media and use artists' references in their work. Year 11 boys' research skills are less well developed than girls', because the girls complete independent research for homework more readily. As a result, boys rely on secondary resource material rather than drawing from direct observation as a starting point for their projects. Higher-attaining pupils show good levels of analysis when they write about artists' intentions, but their knowledge is weaker when placing artists in their historical context. Pupils have too few opportunities to extend their knowledge of artists' techniques and to see original artwork. Most pupils with special needs achieve well in art at GCSE because they are given the opportunity to improve their techniques through effective help from teachers and stimulating classroom displays.

147. The evidence of pupils' artwork together with the lessons observed showed that the quality of teaching and learning is good overall. They were good in many of the lessons observed during the inspection, and most effective in Year 7. Teachers' expertise and very good relationships with pupils promoted their confidence. Pupils worked with interest and enthusiasm because learning activities were challenging. For example, Year 7 pupils used Chinese characters to record their date of birth, as a starting point in learning how to overlap lettering and image to make a composition based on the months of the year. Teachers provided an appropriate balance of skills-based teaching and opportunities for older pupils to work independently. Teachers' planning was most effective in lessons where reference was made to artists' techniques and purpose. For example, Year 9 pupils learned how artists such as Escher, Dali and Magritte develop ideas, and then used similar devices to improve their own designs. Teachers explained and demonstrated well, making good use of the Internet and CD-ROM projection, picture resources and their own work to exemplify good practice. Questioning was effectively used in most lessons to extend higher-attaining pupils and to check what pupils knew and remembered.

148. However, in some year groups, particularly Year 8, pupils' learning has been less than expected because teaching has been disrupted. Where teaching is less effective, as seen in the scrutiny of sketchbooks for some classes in Year 8, the quality of skills development and assessment is poor. Homework is inconsistently linked to class work for some teaching groups.

149. Improvements since the last inspection have been good, particularly raising standards in Years 7 to 9. Teaching is better. The quality of leadership is good and the learning environment is stimulating for pupils and staff. The department has a clear view of where further improvements are needed. Assessment data is beginning to be used more rigorously in planning to raise attainment at GCSE. Management is less effective than leadership, however. Too little monitoring of developments and the teaching in areas where there has been some disruption to pupils' learning has taken place, because the head of department, who is also the faculty leader, has a full teaching timetable and the second teacher in the department has other, senior management priorities. The art technician makes a valuable contribution to pupils' learning. Resources are generally adequate, except that sketchbooks are not supplied for all pupils in Years 7 to 9 and protective clothing is limited. Pupils have the opportunity to see their work displayed around the school, but opportunities to visit galleries and exhibitions are few.

## **DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY**

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

#### Strengths

- Good leadership and management ensure a clear educational direction
- Results are generally above average for the numbers gaining A\* to C grades at GCSE
- Results are consistently well above average in graphics and food technology.
- Planning and documentation are of high quality.
- Curriculum planning is closely linked to the good assessment procedures in Years 7 to 9.

#### Areas for development

- Opportunities for developing pupils' literacy and numeracy, and their spiritual, moral, social and cultural awareness.

150. Teachers' assessments at the end of Year 9 were well above the national average but the evidence of the inspection indicates that these were over-estimated. The standard of current work in Year 9, both in lessons seen and in folders of previous work, is average, and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Pupils, including those with special educational needs, develop appropriate technical knowledge, and understanding of the design process. They engage in practical aspects of the subject keenly. They carry out investigative processes, such as the disassembly of foods, before evaluating their work. A good range of drawing skills is developed during Years 7 to 9. For example, in Year 8 the 'isometric drawing project' enables pupils of all levels of attainment to develop their understanding of how to construct these drawings; they then apply their skills well in a series of progressive exercises. The quality of these three dimensional drawings is often very good and is further enhanced by the use of computers, for example to produce drawings of a vehicle. Another strength of pupils' presentational skills is the use of storyboards (drawings and notes) to describe the stages of making their product. Good examples of this were seen in the Year 7 'steady hand game' and Year 9 'cushion' projects.

151. GCSE results were average overall in 2001. Girls' results are well above the national average for girls, whereas boys' were approximately average. Results have been highest in food technology and graphics. Girls do as well in design and technology as in their other subjects and boys do as well as, or better than, in most of their other subjects. Standards in Year 11 are average, and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Projects contain good research opportunities and pupils develop their ideas systematically through to the final design. By the end of Year 11, most pupils produce satisfactory course work, in terms of content and presentation, and well-made practical projects. There is some use of computer-generated work in many design and technology folders, but this remains an area for development. Practical work is often very good across the range of materials used.

152. The curriculum for each of the subjects within design and technology is well organised. The tasks enable pupils to learn about materials, components and ingredients and then use this knowledge in practical work. For example, Year 8 pupils know the names of electronic components and are able to assemble them into an electrical circuit before assembling their 'spinners' (electrical dice) as part of a board game project. They make good use of spider diagrams to record ideas as part of research. Year 9 pupils compiled detailed specifications before producing very good initial ideas for CD and cassette covers.

153. Teaching is satisfactory overall in Years 7 to 11, with some good teaching in Years 10 and 11. Pupils' learning is satisfactory. Teachers have very good technical knowledge, which is generally used well to plan and teach lessons. Most planning is good, but some lessons could be improved by more detailed consideration of how to help pupils learn. For example, in a Year 8 electronics lesson, a suitable diagram to illustrate a marking-out procedure was not provided until after the demonstration had finished. In the majority of lessons, time is used well. Pupils receive a good level of individual support.

154. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are satisfactory overall and sometimes very good. Overall, pupils are managed satisfactorily. However, where teaching was weaker, pupils' unsatisfactory behaviour occasionally affected the pace and quality of the class's learning. Pupils concentrate best during practical work, but some are uncooperative in theory- or design-based activities, when clear objectives are not set and deadlines fixed. Work is marked regularly but pupils are insufficiently aware of marking criteria. Many Year 10 and 11 pupils spend considerable time and effort improving their work outside

lessons. The success of pupils with special educational needs and those of lower-attainment reflects the generally good levels of effort and concentration that they give to their work.

155. The statutory requirements for design and technology are met, except for the use of computers for control, an aspect that requires further development. The schemes of work do not include planned opportunities to develop numeracy, literacy, the use of computers and the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of design and technology.

156. Leadership and management are good. Close co-operation between teachers is enabling good courses to be developed and standards to be raised. Departmental documentation is good and there is constructive monitoring of the subject to help raise standards. Wherever possible, staff teach their specialisms but there is some non-specialist teaching of food technology and textiles. Accommodation varies in quality. There are very good facilities for work using resistant materials, but the working environment for food technology is unsatisfactory and the work surfaces are in a poor condition. Improvement since the last inspection has been satisfactory.

## GEOGRAPHY

Overall, the quality of provision for geography is **satisfactory**.

### Strengths

- Pupils acquire good skills in geography.
- Teachers have generally high expectations of pupils' effort and work.
- The frequent and challenging opportunities for pupils to use number skills.
- The contribution made to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development

### Areas for improvement

- The attainment of pupils at KS 4.
- The marking of some pupils' work.
- The opportunities for pupils to work independently.
- The use of ICT within the geography curriculum.

157. In 2001, the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 showed that the range of pupils' attainment was average. There has been an upward trend in the assessment over the last three years. The difference in the attainment of boys and girls is similar to that recorded nationally.

158. The work of pupils seen during the inspection and the evidence of the lessons observed confirmed that standards are average by the end of Year 9. Pupils' achievement is satisfactory. A good feature of pupils' learning is the range and quality of subject skills that they are able to develop in their study of places and themes. For example, all Year 9 pupils, when studying sources of power, are able to construct diagrams using tables of data, and to interpret them. Higher-attaining pupils had a sound grasp of cost/benefit analysis, while lower-attaining pupils were able to compare pollution incidents and identify common features. Year 9 pupils made very good progress in advancing their knowledge and understanding of indices by analysing and interpreting data in a lesson on living standards and development.

159. GCSE results have varied from year to year. In 2001, the proportion of pupils who attained grades A\*-C was significantly below the national average. The proportion achieving grades in the range A\*-G was in line with the national figure. While, in previous years, the girls' results had matched their national average, in 2001 they were significantly lower. Boys' outperformed girls but their results were lower than for boys nationally. Pupils did less well in geography than most other subjects in the school. Overall, pupils' achievement in Years 10 and 11 is satisfactory. The overall standard of work in Year 11 is average. Pupils are able to apply the skills developed in earlier years, for example, when interpreting demographic transition. Year 10 pupils showed a good knowledge and understanding of the work of glaciers and rivers and applied this most effectively to identify the physical processes active at coasts. In their written work pupils in Years 10 and 11 use technical terms accurately. All are aware of and

understand the relationships between physical and human aspects of geography. This is very clear in their work on glacial processes and human activities in Alpine areas, and in the study of ecosystems. Pupils respond well to the challenge of decision-making tasks, but they have too few opportunities for work that involves the development of independent study.

160. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress and achieve well in Years 7 to 9. Teachers are aware of their needs, and teaching assistants provide pupils with good support. For example, in a Year 9 lesson, the inclusion of a pupil with emotional and behavioural difficulties was managed effectively. As a result, the pupil was enabled to learn without distracting the other pupils' attention.

161. Good emphasis is placed upon the development of pupils' literacy skills, in line with school policy. Opportunities for pupils to practise and apply their numerical skills are very good. Pupils' exercise books include many examples of the interpretation and analysis of data and some examples of data collection. They draw statistical diagrams of an increasing sophistication as they progress through the school. However, opportunities for them to apply their information communication technology skills are infrequent.

162. The teaching observed during the inspection was good, including a small amount taught by a non-specialist. However, evidence from results and analysis of pupils' work indicates that teaching is satisfactory over time. Teachers have secure subject knowledge and high expectations of pupils' behaviour and work. Pupils are aware of the objectives for their learning in each lesson. Questioning at the beginning and end of lessons checks their understanding, and links the work with that done previously. Careful explanations enable Year 7 pupils to learn good skills in mapping, within a short time. Teachers manage pupils' behaviour well. Teachers have a clear understanding of the National Curriculum and examination requirements. This makes the teaching effective, as seen in a Year 11 lesson during which pupils practised their mapping skills and applied their knowledge of settlements to a study of Chepstow. Pupils responded to this good teaching with interest and made good progress in advancing their knowledge and understanding. Thorough planning ensures that tasks meet the needs of all pupils.

163. The work scrutinised and the lessons showed that pupils are given too little encouragement to make their own decisions and to work independently, rather than be led by the teacher. This is particularly marked at Key Stage 3. The marking of work is usually thorough but inconsistencies occur, both in frequency and rigour, which constrains the progress of a minority of pupils in the lower school. Several classes in Years 7, 8 and 9 are taught in poor accommodation, far from geography resources. This limits the variety and of teaching and learning strategies that it is practical to use.

164. The head of department provides good leadership through example, and the management of geography is satisfactory. Some policies are not implemented consistently. Assessment data is being used increasingly to set targets, to monitor the progress of pupils and, together with the observation of lessons, to evaluate teaching. The curriculum is being reviewed as topics are piloted and re-written. The schemes of work provide good opportunities for pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development. The mix of specialist and non-specialist teachers is satisfactory in impact. The department has achieved a satisfactory improvement since the previous inspection, and has the commitment and capacity necessary for further development.

## HISTORY

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

### Strengths

- Results in GCSE examinations.
- The good quality of teaching and learning in all years, including the marking of pupils' work.
- The promotion of pupils' literacy skills.
- The contribution to pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development.

### Areas for improvement

- The use of ICT in the learning.
- The quality and range of library resources for history.
- The opportunities for pupils to practise number skills.

165. In 2001, the teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 were average overall. Two-thirds of pupils reached the expected standard, a higher proportion than in the preceding year. There has been an upward trend over the past three years. Girls outperform boys by a wider margin than nationally but boys did less well than nationally.

166. In the current Year 9, standards of attainment, as seen both in lessons and in the pupils' work, are average. For example, the work of most Year 9 pupils showed an appreciation of the relative strengths of the main alliances on the outbreak of the Second World War, and lower-attaining pupils could list the main allies. In essays on factory conditions, pupils had used sources effectively, with the higher-attaining pupils interpreting well the evidence available, recognising bias and linking the events.

167. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 are achieving satisfactorily. The work of Year 8 pupils on the dissolution of the monasteries shows that pupils are aware that people view events from different perspectives. The written work of higher-attaining pupils is good. They develop cogent arguments and use sources to good effect. Year 7 pupils studying the English succession, after the death of Edward in 1066, showed a good understanding of the strengths and weaknesses of the claims of the various contenders and used this knowledge effectively in understanding how the new king was chosen.

168. GCSE results have risen over the past three years. In 2001, they were in line with the national average. Pupils do better in history than in almost all other subjects in the school. In previous years girls' attainment has been markedly above their national average and the attainment of boys. However, in 2001 there was very little difference between the performance of girls and boys. Pupils in Years 10 and 11 are achieving satisfactorily and attaining average standards in their current work. Pupils have too few opportunities to use and practise their number skills, though; the successful emphasis placed on developing pupils' literacy skills is evident in the quality of the written work of Year 11 pupils. The good literacy skills of the majority are reflected in their coherent notes and succinct accounts. The work on 'Medicine: The Scientific Revolution' by lower-attaining pupils showed a satisfactory understanding of both the ideas covered and the terms used. The pupils have built up a written record of work that will prove useful as they revise for their examinations. The work of higher-attaining pupils is well structured. They make links between events, select relevant information and draw inferences from the evidence in the sources available.

169. Pupils with special educational needs make good progress. Teachers have access to informative individual education plans and adjust the teaching and learning accordingly. The teaching assistants give very good support to both the targeted pupils and others experiencing difficulties with the work. For example, in a Year 8 lesson on life on the Anglo-Scottish border, it was clear that the teacher and assistant had worked closely together in planning the work for those pupils with special educational needs, who, as a result, made good progress. Good strategies, including the use of writing guidelines or 'frames', glossaries and resources of different levels of difficulty, help pupils to manage challenging ideas and tasks, as well as improving their basic skills.

170. The teaching and learning of history were good in the lessons observed. Evidence from results and a scrutiny of written work indicates that over time teaching and learning are satisfactory. Teachers have good knowledge of the subject. For example, in a Year 10 lesson, the teacher's awareness of the importance of sources and knowledge of the treatment of the poor in Elizabethan England ensured that pupils were focused on the key questions of finding and interpreting evidence. Similar learning experiences are being used increasingly to ensure that pupils have the skills necessary to work independently. Teachers have appropriately high expectations of their pupils. In the most successful lessons, pupils responded enthusiastically to the challenge of the work. Effective questioning consolidated both previous learning and the work covered during the lesson. Relationships were good. Pupils received good support and, as a result, were willing to contribute their ideas and answers. Lessons were well planned and pupils were able to sustain their concentration because the work matched their needs. Teachers mark work thoroughly. The prompt return of work, annotated with

advice about further improvement, motivates the pupils and is a significant strength. A Year 11 pupil who had been absent from an introductory lesson on the American West was given individual help to fill the gap. Where teaching was satisfactory, the management of a minority of younger pupils was ineffective in ensuring the learning of all pupils. While pupils are encouraged to apply their computer skills in carrying out research at home or the school library, insufficient use is made of ICT in the teaching of the subject and to support pupils' learning.

171. The department has been managed well and a significant improvement has been achieved since the last inspection. The recently appointed head of department provides very good leadership and has identified clear priorities for further improvement. The teachers work well together, both in planning teaching and learning and in producing supplementary materials. Assessment data is being increasingly used to monitor the progress of pupils' targets. Monitoring of lessons is helping the department to evaluate and improve teaching and learning. The measures taken to induct new teachers are very effective. Teachers share the teaching of a number of classes in Years 7 to 9 and, while this is well managed, it creates difficulties in maintaining continuity in pupils' learning. Resources are good overall. However, the library does not contain sufficient books of good quality to support research and reference work in history. The accommodation is adequate. Classrooms are enhanced by the very good displays of pupils' work, word lists, information on National Curriculum levels and visual aids to learning. The department has both the commitment and capacity necessary for effective further development.

## INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

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

### Strengths

- Standards of attainment, particularly for pupils in Years 10 and 11.
- Good relationships between staff and pupils create a good learning environment.
- Teachers provide good individual support in lessons for pupils at all levels of attainment.

### Areas for improvement

- The coverage of statutory requirements for ICT in other subjects.
- Planning to meet the specific learning needs of pupils at different attainment levels.

172. The teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 in ICT were above the national average, as are the standards attained by the pupils now in Year 9. Pupils of all levels of attainment, including those with special needs, are competent in the basic ICT skills. These include desktop publishing, and the use of the Internet, spreadsheets, databases, multimedia presentations and a range of electronic resources such as scanners and digital cameras. Higher-attaining pupils work independently and complete tasks quickly, showing depth of knowledge in their understanding of the work they do. Teachers generally provide a good structure for pupils' work by issuing guidance booklets. Lower-attaining pupils cover a good range of basic skills and are well supported on a one-to-one basis in lessons.

173. The achievement of pupils in Years 7 to 9 is good. Year 7 pupils are introduced to a broad range of ICT skills, including databases, word processing, desktop publishing combining text and graphics. In Years 8 and 9, they increase their knowledge of using databases and spreadsheets. They research information using the Internet and successfully modify and present information for a chosen audience.

174. GCSE results in 2001 were above average. Information technology was not taken as a GCSE examination in previous years. Pupils now follow courses in either GCSE or GNVQ at Intermediate or Advanced Level. Those who do not choose to do ICT at examination level can complete a skills-based certificate course based on skills practised in English, mathematics and French.

175. The work seen during the inspection showed that standards in Year 11 are well above national expectations. Folders show good evidence of pupils using spreadsheets and desktop publishing to process and present data, and they show a good level of understanding in applying these skills. Many pupils used ICT effectively in their GCSE coursework. Pupils used spreadsheets to process data and



then presented the results in the form of graphs and charts, noting the changes and trends as they work through the process. Pupils are taught to use specialist software to prepare presentations on chosen subjects for various audiences.

176. Achievement is very good in examination courses in Years 10 and 11. Evidence from Year 11 pupils' folders showed that tasks are completed with care, with a good level of knowledge at the depth needed to achieve good GCSE grades. Pupils explain their work using a good range of technical vocabulary, which they apply accurately to their written work in class.

177. The quality of teaching and learning of ICT is good in Years 7 to 9 and very good in Years 10 and 11, in the specialist lessons. The ICT department has a good learning ethos. Pupils form good relationships with their peers, the teachers and other adults in the department. This has had a good impact on the learning. Pupils work in a mature way and ask their teachers for help when they need it. The ICT rooms are well organised, and pupils show a business-like approach when using the range of resources available. Teachers plan and organise well. In lessons where the learning was good, the teachers set clear objectives, which enabled pupils to work well independently. Teachers used interesting methods to capture the interest of the pupils and at the same time structured the activities to include a good range of basic ICT skills. An example of this was seen in a Year 7 class, where the teacher used the model of a filing cabinet to explain how the files are organised in a database. The pupils then set up their own database tables in the same way, using the software purposefully. They also read from a range of texts when using books, CD-ROMs and the Internet researching their work. Teachers target questions effectively to assess how much pupils understand and remember. Pupils show good levels of concentration as a result of this active questioning, which challenges them to broaden their thinking and participation in lessons.

178. The use of computers in other subjects across the curriculum is unsatisfactory overall. It is good in English, science, modern foreign languages and music; it is satisfactory in design and technology and physical education, and unsatisfactory in mathematics, art, geography, history, and religious education. In some subjects, there is good use. For example, in science pupils use word processing, spreadsheets, and data-logging software to record temperatures and light. The science department makes good use of the ten laptops in the department. In design and technology, pupils use computer-aided design and manufacturing processes well, particularly in Years 10 and 11 as part of their GCSE coursework projects. However, there is only a limited range of resources for control technology in the department. In English, pupils use word processing effectively to draft, edit and redraft their work. In Year 10, pupils write and construct a news-sheet when they study 'Romeo and Juliet'. In modern foreign languages, pupils use ICT well to present their work and to support revision.

179. Management of ICT is good. Monitoring and evaluation of teaching and learning are good and the information gained has helped teaching to improve. There has been considerable investment to upgrade the computer network since the last inspection. The technician support is very good. Improvement since the last inspection has been good. Teaching and learning in specialist ICT lessons are now good, and pupils' achievement is higher. The use of ICT is inconsistent in other subjects across the curriculum and is therefore unsatisfactory overall.

## MODERN FOREIGN LANGUAGES

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

### Strengths

- GCSE results in French have improved steadily since the last inspection.
- The monitoring and recording of pupils' achievement and progress are very good.
- The department is well managed.
- The use of ICT helps raise standards.

### Areas for development.

- The achievement of lower-attaining boys, and the standards they attain.
- The unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour of a minority of pupils, and their progress.

- Teachers' use of French for instructions and classroom organisation in some lessons.
- The presentation and practising of grammar in a structured way, using communicative contexts.

180. The results of teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2000 were above average. Girls achieved considerably higher standards than boys, but inspection evidence indicates that these were overestimated. During the inspection, pupils demonstrated standards in line with national expectations and these standards were confirmed from a scrutiny of pupils' written work.

181. Pupils' achievement in French in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory in all the four language skills of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Some pupils' listening skills are well developed. For example, pupils in a Year 8 class understood the complex rules of a group game when they were carefully explained in French, assisted by clear mime and gesture. In a Year 9 class, most pupils correctly picked out main details in a lengthy tape recording about a journey. Most pupils repeat words and phrases with good pronunciation and intonation, chorally and individually. Many pupils make good progress in their writing skills. By Year 9, some pupils have good basic writing skills, and higher and average pupils write, with the aid of models or writing frames, short texts containing present, future and past tenses. Some pupils are beginning to have an awareness of basic grammatical patterns, but the teaching of grammar in a communicative context needs to be developed further.

182. In Russian, pupils have very good listening skills. A Year 9 class of beginners understood a whole lesson conducted in Russian. Their speaking skills are also good. After only ten weeks, they can take part in a simple dialogue in a shop, count with accuracy and exchange basic personal information. They also have a good comprehension of the Russian script and can copy words accurately.

183. Results in GCSE French have risen steadily since the last inspection. Unusually, almost the whole year group takes GCSE in French. Results in 2001 were slightly above the national average, with boys and girls achieving slightly above their respective averages. This was an improvement on 2000, when the results for girls were above average, whereas the results for boys were very low compared to national expectations. The department has analysed the performance of boys over recent years and found that boys in the top four sets now achieve slightly higher levels than girls. There remains some underachievement amongst boys in the lower sets. In the Certificate of Achievement in French in 2001, all pupils entered gained a merit or distinction. This is a considerable achievement since they have only one lesson a week. Results in GCSE Russian were average in 2000 and 2001. Since the last inspection, results in Russian have been in line with or above the national average.

184. The evidence from lessons and from a scrutiny of pupils' written work showed that Year 11 pupils' attainment in French is now average. Pupils' achievement in French is satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. Many pupils do well in listening. For example, in a Year 11 GCSE class of higher-attaining pupils, all pupils coped well with a lesson conducted almost entirely in French spoken at normal speed by a native speaker, and were able to follow a fairly extended story told in French. Some pupils' speaking skills are well developed, and they have good pronunciation and intonation. In writing, low-attaining pupils label pictures accurately, and write sentences and short descriptive paragraphs. Higher-attaining pupils use subordinate clauses and four tenses correctly. Their work is generally accurate, and occasionally redrafted to a good standard using ICT. Some pupils use computer skills learned in mathematics to gain a Certificate of Achievement in ICT as an alternative to GCSE in computer studies.

185. In Russian, many pupils have good listening skills. In the Year 11 Russian group, pupils understood a lesson taught in Russian and were able to recall and use a wide range of basic vocabulary and language structures with good standards of pronunciation. They could also conduct role-play with reasonable accuracy. Reading skills are sound and most pupils have no difficulty decoding the handwritten and printed Cyrillic script. In the Year 10 Russian set, pupils read without difficulty a letter containing personal details. Most pupils can write short paragraphs on basic situations with good accuracy.

186. French and Russian contribute well to pupils' general literacy because of the emphasis on correct spelling and the development of increased grammatical awareness.

187. The teaching of French is satisfactory overall, as is pupils' learning. Teaching was good or better in over two-thirds of all lessons. Very occasionally in Years 7 to 9 teaching was unsatisfactory. The teaching of Russian is good. All the lessons observed were very well prepared. They were nearly always taught enthusiastically and at a brisk pace, which motivated pupils to learn well. Effective use was made of deadlines to motivate pupils and keep them on target. The content of most lessons was carefully graded and matched to the needs and interests of pupils, with frequent change of task. This ensured that all pupils, including those with special educational needs, made appropriate progress.

188. Occasionally, lesson objectives were not clear, the pace was slow, there was insufficient challenge and teachers made too much use of English, which resulted in pupils not learning well enough.

189. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally very good in both languages. Most pupils are very enthusiastic language learners, eager to demonstrate their skills. Many pupils show good levels of concentration and contribute well to all lesson activities, settle down to work quickly and remain on task. In a small minority of lessons, a few pupils with unsatisfactory attitudes and behaviour hold up the progress of the majority.

190. Trips to France, a pen friend programme and an exchange with a school in Moscow mean that the department makes a strong contribution to the cultural development of some pupils. The department benefits from good leadership, which is helping to raise standards of teaching and improve learning. Teachers work very well together. Documentation is good. Assessment policies and procedures are very good and ensure that pupils' progress is monitored very effectively. Most pupils are clear about National Curriculum levels and GCSE grades, which helps their progress. The department has subdivided the National Curriculum levels in order to provide greater motivation for pupils by showing their progression more clearly. The improvement since the last inspection has been good. GCSE results have increased significantly. The quality of teaching has improved. The learning of many pupils is significantly better, and standards in all four skills are higher. The department has a good capacity for further development.

## MUSIC

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

### Strengths

- Teachers motivate pupils well by communicating their enthusiasm and providing interesting tasks
- Good relationships between pupils and teachers gives pupils confidence to develop their ideas

### Areas for improvement

- Boys' performance in Years 7 to 9
- Share and build on the best practice in teaching
- Planning for the full range of learners

191. Overall, teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 in 2001 were significantly above the national figures. This standard was not borne out by observations of the work of the pupils now in Year 9 because pupils' achievements were overestimated. Inspection evidence shows that standards in Year 9 are in line with national expectations. Girls generally perform better than boys. Pupils understand the basic elements of music, such as tempo, pitch and structure, through performing and composing on keyboards and a range of classroom instruments. The majority of pupils are keen to learn, enjoy the interesting practical activities and participate willingly. Higher-attaining pupils use simple chord sequences effectively to accompany their melodies. They show a good understanding of the use of timbre, dynamics and texture to achieve effective results. In a Year 9 lesson, a boy created an extended sequence successfully combining major and minor chords in root position. He then performed it to the rest of the class who listened with interest. By the end of Year 9, lower-attaining pupils create simple compositions but cannot add suitable rhythmic accompaniments to their melodies.

192. Pupils' achievement in Years 7 to 9 is satisfactory. Pupils in Year 7 eagerly tackled a task designed to demonstrate the various timbres available within the room. They then constructed a rhythm grid to notate their work. Some Year 7 pupils cannot demonstrate a secure sense of pulse when trying

to clap simple rhythms. A minority of pupils, particularly in Year 9, cannot sustain concentration for long spells, which sometimes hinders the learning of others.

193. The nature of GCSE groups varies from year to year because numbers are comparatively small. In GCSE examinations for 2001 and 2000, the proportion of pupils gaining grades A\* to C was below average but in line with the school's expectations of those pupils. However, all pupils gained at least a grade G. GCSE results in 1999 were above the national figures. Standards in the current Year 11 are in line with expectations for the course and pupils' achievement is satisfactory. Pupils do best in performing and composing. Pupils work well together when composing in small groups, carefully selecting a variety of suitable sound sources and incorporating them into well-structured pieces. Their theoretical knowledge is generally weaker. Year 11 pupils identified the components of oratorio including 'recitative secco', and 'basso continuo'. However, pupils occasionally struggle to recall previously learned information and they make too little use of technical vocabulary when writing about music. Some pupils make good artistic decisions. For example, a Year 10 pupil selected the sound of a harpsichord to perform a fugue, feeling that it was more in keeping with the style and mood of the music.

194. Teaching and learning are satisfactory overall. In the lessons seen during the inspection, teaching varied from good to unsatisfactory. Teachers are enthusiastic and have good knowledge of their subject, which they effectively pass on to their pupils. In the best lessons, objectives for pupils' learning were clear, and effective whole-class questioning helped pupils to recall information from the previous lesson. Teachers gave useful support and advice to individual pupils to enable them to make good progress. However, planning does not always cater sufficiently for the full range of pupils in a class. In one lesson, too much time was spent on a single activity, pupils' learning became inefficient, and lower attaining pupils did not receive the help they needed.

195. Relationships between staff and pupils are a strength of the department, particularly in examination classes. Students feel confident enough to make suggestions when rehearsing music and appraising each other's work. Written homework and the emphasis on key words in lessons enable music to make a positive contribution to the development of pupils' literacy.

196. The management of the subject is satisfactory and the department has made satisfactory improvement since the last inspection. Assessment procedures have improved. There has been good progress in fulfilling the requirements for using ICT. There is a clear sense of purpose within the department, including firm plans for raising standards and increasing participation in extracurricular activities. Over 75 pupils receive instrumental lessons at present and a good range of choirs, bands and other ensembles supplement the curriculum. Regular musical performances, in school and the local community, provide good opportunities for pupils' social and cultural development.

## PHYSICAL EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Teaching and learning are good.
- Teachers have very good knowledge and understanding of the activities and use progressive practices to build pupils' skills and confidence.
- Relationships with pupils are good.

### Areas for improvement

- GCSE results, as they are below the national average.
- Assessment procedures, to help pupils understand what they have to do to improve.
- The department's consistent implementation of its aims and strategies.

197. Teacher assessments at the end of Year 9 indicated that pupils' work was well above the national average, with girls' standards of attainment higher than those of boys. The evidence of the inspection suggests that these assessments were too high and that is overall in line with national expectations.

Some pupils in some activities, for example boys in hockey and girls in netball, are working at a level above national expectations. These pupils show good hand-eye co-ordination and can sustain a good level of tactical play in a competitive situation. In gymnastics, pupils are generally at or just below the level of national expectations and the standards of attainment overall for the majority of pupils in this key stage is in line with national expectations.

198. GCSE results have fluctuated in the last three years but still show an improvement since the last inspection. They rose in 2000 to 50 per cent A\* to C, from 30 per cent in 1999. In 2001, they fell again to 44 per cent, which is below the national average of 53 per cent. The standards of practical performance seen during the inspection were overall in line with national expectations, but some boys in hockey and basketball and some girls in netball working at a level higher than this. In the theory aspects of the GCSE course, however, pupils' knowledge and understanding are below average; the majority struggled to give the name, location in the body and function of specific muscles. Overall, attainment in Key Stage 4 is average.

199. Achievement in Key Stage 3 is good. Many pupils arrive in the school in Year 7 with below average physical skills, for example, with poor co-ordination and ball-handling skills. By the end of Year 9, the majority of pupils are working at the nationally expected level and some are attaining beyond this. Many pupils make less progress in Key Stage 4. Factors such as the loss of lesson time for other meetings and modules contribute to this. Overall achievement is satisfactory; most pupils achieve better in the practical aspects of physical education rather than in the theoretical aspects studied for GCSE.

200. Pupils with special educational needs make satisfactory progress. Teachers are aware of the needs of individual pupils, but they do not always allow for this enough in their planning. The department has a clear policy for matching work to pupils' capabilities, but it is inconsistently applied. Support for a physically disabled pupil is very good and enables her to take part in appropriately lessons. Gifted and talented pupils are helped to make further progress by the department's policy of assisting them to become involved in district and county teams as well as local clubs.

201. Teaching seen during the inspection was good in Years 7 to 9 and satisfactory in Years 10 and 11. None was unsatisfactory. A strength of the teaching is the teachers' very good knowledge and understanding of the different activities. They challenge pupils progressively so that they gradually build up skill and confidence. The warm-up is not used consistently in all lessons to enable pupils to understand the effects of exercise on the body. However, all lessons seen included a good evaluation at the end, when pupils were able to reflect on what they had learned. Pupils' learning is good. In a Year 8 netball lesson, pupils were able to improve their success at centre passes in a game by practising dodging techniques and discussing tactics beforehand. In hockey in Year 11, pupils gradually learned to become more aware of passing and receiving the ball on their strong side and this awareness showed in their positioning during a game.

202. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are generally good. Lessons begin promptly and efficiently and pupils obviously enjoy the challenges of the tasks set for them. The good relationships between pupils and teachers are a key factor in the overall good teaching and learning which goes on in physical education.

203. The curriculum meets statutory requirements. Outdoor education is included in Year 7 during an annual visit to camp. The department is considering extending outdoor education in Years 8 and 9. A good range of extracurricular activities provides good opportunities for extension and enhancement of the curriculum for all pupils, and particularly for those whose attainment is high.

204. The last inspection report noted as unsatisfactory the fact that a proportion of Year 9 pupils lost one period of physical education each week in order to take up Russian as a second language. This situation continues and is still unsatisfactory for any pupils who might wish to follow the GCSE course in physical education.

205. Because of the deployment of key members of the department in other areas of the school in the time since the last inspection, leadership and management of the department is unsatisfactory, as is improvement since the last inspection. Teachers tend to work in isolation and the department does not

function as a cohesive unit. There is no monitoring taking place within the department of its effectiveness. Assessment has not been sufficiently developed since the last inspection to provide sufficient data to assist curriculum planning. Pupils are not clear about what they have to do to improve their level of performance in different activities. Although key words are displayed on the wall of the sports hall, there are no policies for developing literacy and numeracy through physical education. There is no clear vision for the future of the department and this is having an impact on pupils' standards of attainment and their ability to achieve, particularly in Key Stage 4, where GCSE results are still below the national average. Planning for the use of computers is satisfactory but no use was made of ICT during the inspection.

## RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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

### Strengths

- Good results in the GCSE short course.
- Pupils are well managed in lessons.
- The head of department's very good knowledge both of the subject and the course requirements ensures full syllabus coverage at each level

### Areas for development.

- The opportunities to use ICT.
- Spread the good practice observed in planning for and teaching mixed ability classes.
- The resources for the full GCSE course.

206. Results in the GCSE short course examinations in 2000 were in line with the national average, a standard sustained since the last inspection. The GCSE short course results for 2001, with a much larger entry than previously, were above the national average.

207. Standards of work in Year 9 are currently in line with national expectations. Pupils give thoughtful views on sensitive issues, for example when discussing death and grieving. They confidently offered their views on life after death. In a subsequent writing task, they reflected on the meaning of various epitaphs they had thought about; most pupils were able to write perceptively about their meaning. In diaries of a journey to Mecca, the work showed an understanding of key words and ideas that built upon past learning about prayer and spirituality. Higher-attaining pupils showed in their writing that they understood the spiritual nature of the experience for pilgrims. Most pupils presented their work carefully and all demonstrated a good understanding of the topic.

208. Pupils in Years 7 to 9 achieve well in relation to their previous attainment. Pupils seen in Year 7 could write fluently about the birth of Buddha, with higher-attaining pupils offering intelligent suggestions as to why his birth was perceived as a special event. Although a minority were challenged by the demands of writing, they clearly had grasped the basic details of each topic. In Year 8, there were good responses from all pupils, and especially from higher-attaining pupils. When writing about the Ten Commandments, pupils were able to differentiate between them and argue why in moral terms one might be more important than another.

209. Standards in Year 11 are above national expectations. In a Year 11 mixed-ability class, the higher-attaining pupils appreciated arguments for the existence of God. They compared different viewpoints with discernment. Behaviour in almost all lessons is well managed, but a significant minority in a Year 11 class were unwilling to be open-minded and enter into the spirit of enquiry, despite the imaginative and sensitive urging of their teacher. The sample of written work showed that many of these pupils were able to use evidence from everyday experience, as well as their study of religion, in formulating their views. For example, higher- and average-attaining pupils have drawn on their knowledge of the traditions and beliefs of Islam and Christianity to develop arguments for and against retaining marriage. In a lesson in Year 10, the first group of pupils taking the full GCSE in religious education considered religion and environmental issues. The higher-attaining among them wrote well to

link conservation initiatives in Oman to the teachings of Islam. Most pupils in this class responded well to the task and established their basic understanding of these events as well as the religious dimension. Progress is good through Key Stage 4 and pupils achieve well.

210. Overall, teaching is good. Some very good teaching was observed. Here, the teacher's preparation combined a good range of well-planned activities, accessible materials and carefully chosen groups, ensuring that all could cope with the tasks. In a Year 7 class, pupils with special educational needs were well supported by classroom assistants, enabling them to recount the story of the birth of Buddha in detail. Other strengths in teaching are the confidence in and knowledge of the subject and of the syllabus, enabling varied learning activities to be sequenced well. The pupils learned well in these lessons. For example, the simple but engrossing task in which Year 11 fitted together the components of a watch to make a functioning whole awakened pupils' interest, and pupils of all levels of attainment achieved well. Where learning was less successful, though still satisfactory overall, the teacher had not given enough thought to the need of all the pupils in the mixed-ability classes. Pupils were sometimes distracted and lost concentration on the task.

211. Since the last inspection, the department has developed well. The new head of department manages the subject well and religious education enjoys increased success at examination level. She has extended the range of activities to increase pupils' motivation and independence. The good teaching methods reflect a thorough knowledge of the requirements of the local Agreed Syllabus and the GCSE courses. The department's provision is effectively supplemented by outside speakers. During the inspection, a visiting group discussed Jesus' incarnation. This developed pupils' religious thinking well and led to good debate. Pupils' improved response to religious education is demonstrated in the increased take-up for both GCSE courses this year. More opportunities are required for staff to share the good practice with mixed ability classes observed in many lessons seen. Resources are satisfactory, but full course GCSE students are limited at present by the need to share textbooks. Schemes of work do not yet include enough opportunities for pupils to use computers. The department has a good capacity for further development.

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

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

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

### ***GCE AS level courses***

Subject	Number entered	% gaining grades A-E		% gaining grades A-B		Average point score	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Computer Studies	6	83	74	0	13	1.2	1.8
French	1	100	78	0	13	2.0	1.7
Geography	1	100	74	0	6	3.0	1.2
Mathematics	1	100	62	0	15	2.0	1.5
Music	1	100	84	0	29	3.0	2.4
Other Languages	2	100	N/a	50	N/a	3.0	N/a

### ***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
Art and design	5	80	96	0	46	3.2	6.6
Biology	11	100	88	18	34	5.1	5.3
Chemistry	10	80	90	30	43	4.6	5.9
Communication Studies	3	67	93	0	31	2.7	5.5
Economics	8	63	89	13	36	2.0	5.5
English Literature	17	100	95	35	37	5.8	5.9
French	2	100	89	0	38	4.0	5.6
Full Design and Technology	4	100	91	0	30	5.0	5.3
Geography	4	100	92	0	38	4.0	5.7
History	6	100	88	33	35	6.3	5.5
Mathematics	12	67	87	33	43	4.0	5.8
Music	6	100	93	-	35	4.3	5.7
Physics	3	100	88	67	40	6.7	5.7

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

Qualification	No in final year	% gaining qualification		% gaining merit		Average point distinction	
		School	England	School	England	School	England
Business	4	50	N/a	0	N/a	0	N/a



## SUBJECTS AND COURSES GROUPED IN CURRICULUM AREAS

### MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCES

#### Mathematics

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

##### Strengths

- Skills and techniques are taught thoroughly.
- Teaching is good and students receive good support from teachers.
- Students are enthusiastic and well organised in their learning.

##### Area for improvement

- The opportunities for students to deduce conclusions for themselves.

212. A-level results have remained in line with national averages since the last inspection. During this time the number of students entered for A-level has also remained at about 12 students each year. In 2001, the overall results were slightly below those of previous years, but more students achieved the highest grades (A and B). In comparison, the AS level results in 2001 were better, with all Year 12 students gaining grade E or better. During the last three years, students have generally done as well as could be predicted from their GCSE results and boys and girls have generally done equally well. Most students complete the full A-level course.

213. The standards of work of current students are at the levels expected at this stage in their AS and A2 modules. Students are able to follow courses in pure mathematics and mechanics and they make sound progress as a result of effective teaching. For example, where Year 12 students are still not fully competent with the algebraic requirements of their course, Year 13 students have acquired good knowledge and understanding and are able to cope well with the algebraic manipulation necessary for their trigonometry module. In other areas, students have good recall of previous work such as the trigonometric ratios in all quadrants, and can apply this in new situations.

214. Teaching is good and provides well for the individual needs of students so that they make systematic progress. Teachers have good subject knowledge and are confident in their teaching. Their questioning and explanations are clear and appropriately challenging to make students think for themselves and build effectively on students' previous knowledge to extend it to higher levels of understanding. Teaching methods tend to be through detailed discussion of new ideas although, on occasion, teachers do too much of the thinking for students so that they do not become active participants in learning until they are required to apply their new knowledge to solve textbook problems. By contrast, where the introduction to the lesson requires students to think for themselves and use previous learning, as in a Year 13 lesson where students had to work together to solve a different form of trigonometric equation, students were actively involved from the start of the lesson and were able to develop a new technique with minimal teacher intervention. Similarly, Year 12 students discovered some of the differences between arithmetic and geometric series for themselves through a clearly thought out task at the beginning of the session. Graphic calculators are used well to broaden students' understanding.

215. Students are well known by their teachers, who work sensitively with individuals to check progress and ensure that they are properly involved in the lessons. Students respond well to the opportunities provided for them. An additional, optional tutorial lesson is offered and the vast majority of students choose to attend on a regular basis. Time is generally well managed in lessons providing an appropriate balance between learning new concepts and giving time for practising new techniques. Students are attentive and work together to help one another and discuss common difficulties. They carry out the tasks set for private study conscientiously and as a consequence gain valuable practice and confidence in applying their learning to a broad range of situations.

216. The management of the subject is good. Programmes are developed to capitalise on the skills of the members of the department and to be flexible in meeting the interests and needs of students in different year groups. There is a consistent departmental approach to the development of study skills through, for example, the use of formula cards, which students use sensibly. Students' progress is closely monitored and teachers work together to deal with any problems encountered. Encouragement is given to students beyond their formal programmes and many students have been successful in national competitions over a number of years.

## SCIENCES

217. The focus during the inspection was on biology. In addition, chemistry and physics were sampled.

218. In **chemistry**, the A-level result in 2000 gained by the small group of students was just above the national average. In 2001, a larger group did slightly better at grades A and B in A-level than the previous year, though two students failed to pass. Only three students chose to study the new AS examination: two passed and one achieved a top grade. A much larger group is studying AS level this year and they were very well taught in the lesson observed. The two students preparing for the A2 examination are enjoying their studies and making sound progress. Marking of these students' work, and of many of those in Year 12, is detailed and helpful to them for improvement. As with the two other advanced science subjects, AS and A2 chemistry is taught in laboratories used by even the youngest pupils. This is not conducive to developing a suitable ethos for advanced study.

219. **Physics** has been the least popular of the science subjects, with just seven A-level entries in the past three years, compared with 17 in chemistry and 35 in biology. To some extent, this reflects the attitudes pupils show to the physics part of the GCSE science syllabus in Years 10 and 11. However, the small number who sat the A-level examination in the past three years did well – all but one passed and four reached grade A or B. Four of the eight students who sat the new AS examination in 2001 achieved grades A or B, though the remainder failed. The similarly sized present Year 12 AS group is being satisfactorily taught, except for the unsatisfactory marking of their work which does little to help them to improve.

### Biology

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

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#### Strengths

- The improved A-level results in 2001
- Teaching is at least satisfactory and sometimes good
- Students make satisfactory progress
- Regular reviews of students' progress in relation to their examination targets

#### Areas for improvement

- Laboratory accommodation and resources suited to work at an advanced level
  - Higher expectations on the use of key skills in biology
- 

220. In 2000, eighteen students sat the A-level examination and obtained results that were well below the national average. No student gained one of the two top grades, which was also the position the previous year. Only two-thirds of the students passed. The 2001 results were better. All eleven students passed, and two of them reached grade B. Almost all of these Year 13 students achieved the grades expected of them. Also in 2001, fourteen students took the AS examination at the end of Year 12. Three students gained grade A. All but two passed, though five reached only the lowest pass grade. Overall, the results did not quite reach the standard expected, based on predictions arising from the students' GCSE results. The great majority of students who start advanced biology studies complete them, after some movement in the early weeks of Year 12.

221. Work seen in Years 12 and 13 during the inspection, both in lessons and in students' files, shows that students make sound progress and generally are reaching the standards expected by their Year 11 GCSE successes. In Year 12, students have developed a secure understanding, for example, of the

structure and function of enzymes and know how to carry out an investigation to test factors that can change the effectiveness of a commonly found enzyme. Early work on understanding food relationships between a cluster of plants and animals also is developing satisfactorily. Overall, the standard of work in the two Year 12 classes in the first term of their AS studies is below average, though achievement is satisfactory. Due to the quality of teaching and students' own attitudes to their studies, achievement in Year 13 also is satisfactory, though with somewhat below average attainment overall. In a lesson on the detailed structure and function of the kidney, for example, students grappled well with the topic and most reached a sound or better understanding of the complex ideas involved. Only girls are studying A2 biology, whereas a third of those in Year 12 are boys. In general, the boys are doing as well as the girls. Given the size of the classes, ranging from five to sixteen students, students receive a good deal of individual attention so that the most able, as well as those starting from lower achievement at GCSE, progress equally well.

222. Teaching is satisfactory, with a number of strengths, so that students are learning at a generally satisfactory rate. Lessons are well prepared, helped by the technicians when there is practical work, so that time is fully used for learning. A satisfactory range of activities is planned which help to maintain students' interest and concentration. Occasionally, however, there is a lack of resources to hand that would help to bring the topic alive for the students. Lessons begin with links to previous work and finish with a review that draws together what students should have learnt. In this way, students understand how the course is unfolding and how well they have done in relation to the purpose of the lesson. Sound knowledge of the requirements of the examination syllabus leads to clear explanations of new work. Teaching is well paced, thus helping to ensure that no student is left behind when they make enough effort, which is usually the case. Plenty of questions are asked to check students' grasp of the work. But some students are slow to ask questions when they need to do so. Thus, teaching does not always uncover gaps in their knowledge and understanding. Some students are painstaking in their study of biology. However, not enough is always expected of students' written work, particularly in their note taking: some students might be encouraged to apply more time and effort to build really useful notes. Marking of key pieces of students' work is thorough, thus providing students with helpful feedback.

223. Students are building files of their notes, reports of their investigations, past examination questions, printed notes and photocopied material which should prove useful when they are revising. Some students, especially those who are working at a higher level than are others, are particularly thorough in the detail contained in their notes and other written work. Students use computers for a range of purposes, including presentation of coursework, research and revision. This skill is also employed during practical work, though not extensively enough to have a significant impact on standards. Number is used satisfactorily to organise and communicate findings during investigative work.

224. The teacher in charge of biology has been recently appointed to this post and is getting to grips with what needs to be done to keep the subject developing. A strength which underpins this is the attention given to using students' AS or A2 targets for keeping a check of their progress. Sixth form teaching of biology does not have a laboratory where resources for advanced work can be stored, including reference materials, and where students can carry out longer term investigations. This is hampering their progress and the overall quality of their experience in the sixth form. The tight budget for science results in key items of equipment not being purchased, replaced or serviced, such as microscopes. The previous inspection report made no explicit reference to A-level biology so improvement since that time is unclear. However, the better examination results in 2001 point in the right direction.

## **ENGINEERING, DESIGN AND MANUFACTURING**

225. Examination results for the relatively small numbers of students taking design and technology in the sixth form are better at A-level than at A/S Level, but they are in line overall with the national average.

## **BUSINESS**

## **Business.**

226. Overall, standards of attainment are below the national average, though students' achievement is satisfactory when their work is compared with their attainment at GCSE. Pupils make satisfactory progress as they build upon the work covered at Key stage 4. In the sample of lessons observed, teaching was good. Students work diligently and make effective use of ICT. However, arrangements for the practice of number and communication skills are not as good. The work-related experience undertaken by each student is a valuable component of the course and one which students enjoy.

227. The course is taught by teachers qualified in business studies and economics, together with specialists in ICT. The accommodation provided is satisfactory, though there is no designated room.

228. Since the last inspection, the school has introduced two vocational courses for sixth formers in order to match the courses offered more closely to students' needs. Students and parents' perceptions of the value of such courses are positive. However, as yet the number opting to join is low. A total of 19 students take the AVCE course in business, 16 in Year 12 and three in Year 13. In 2001, 2 students opted for the AVCE course in health and social care. These have been added to the Year 13 group.

## **INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY**

### **Information and communication technology (ICT)**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Standards are improving
- Good relationships between staff and students create a good learning ethos
- Teachers provide a good level of guidance and support for individual students who, as a result, show a good level of independence in the way they work

#### **Areas for improvement**

- There are limited opportunities for students who do not choose to follow ICT at examination level to develop their skills further
- Students following examination courses are not sufficiently familiar with the examination coursework marking criteria

course in 2001 achieved a pass grade.

229. The quality of teaching and learning in sixth form ICT is good. Planning, preparation and organisation of teaching overall are good. Teachers have good subject knowledge and, as a result, topics are covered in depth. Teachers' good relationships with the students create a good learning ethos in which there are constant exchanges with the teacher and a mature approach by students to their work. Teachers set clear objectives in lessons and in the guidelines they provide for students on coursework, but students are not sufficiently aware of how the marks are allocated for different sections of the examination coursework. In the majority of lessons, students were able to plan their own work and work with a good level of independence. Teachers covered knowledge in good depth and explained the information well but did not always make full use of the resources available. As a consequence, students showed a good level of understanding and learning was good but they lacked the more practical application of the knowledge. This was seen in a Year 13 lesson where pupils were building on their knowledge of network systems. The teacher explained the knowledge and this was well supported with notes to reinforce the learning. The opportunity was missed to increase students' understanding by using the school's network system as an example of a system in operation. Although learning was good, the students lacked the practical application of the knowledge they gained. All students showed a good level of understanding of the numerical skills required and applied them successfully to the work they covered.

230. As part of their course students are encouraged to complete a network management certificate course. At this stage of the course, the numeracy skills extended mainly to the use of spreadsheets and the processing of data to achieve the desired outcomes of their coursework projects. Students spoke

confidently about their work and showed a good level of understanding, both of the knowledge covered in their work as well as the flexibility and limitations of the software they were using. They showed a good command of language skills associated with the subject and applied these terms confidently when describing modern technological processes and practices.

231. The use of computers in the sixth form is unsatisfactory overall for students who do not follow examination courses in ICT. There has now been an improvement in the provision of a new ICT suite of computers in the sixth form centre and the use of this resource by the students is now increasing. The full impact of this resource is not yet fully evident in the work seen during the inspection. Some exceptional work was seen in science, where a student researched the properties of different oils. In design and technology, students use and contribute to work available on the Internet. Some use of ICT was also seen in history. Students now have good opportunities to use word processing to present their work on an individual basis, but the use of ICT in subjects across the sixth form is underdeveloped. Management of the subject in the sixth form is good. The course is well established and a good standard of monitoring of students' work is helping to raise standards further.

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

232. The opportunity for students to follow a course in physical education is good. It is also good that students in Year 12 have a timetabled slot for physical education. The take up by students is disappointing. In the session visited only three students arrived and one of those could not take part because of injury. This lack of commitment makes it impossible for the physical education department to plan a relevant and appropriate programme which continues the aim of work in the main school, that exercise is an essential component of a healthy lifestyle.

## **HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE**

233. The school provides two vocational subjects at GNVQ Intermediate and ACVE levels. Students are able to progress from the intermediate courses to the advanced. Students and parents perceptions of the value of such courses are positive, however, as yet the number opting to join are low. In 2001, two students opted for the course in health and social care. These have been added to the Year 13 group. The small numbers of students opting for these courses make the comparison of results with national figures unreliable. Vocational courses were not included as areas to be inspected in detail.

234. The number of courses available is set to rise in 2002 as students move from Key stage 4 where there is a wider range of vocational courses. Further, expansion is planned through the extension of links with another school. Students' achievement is satisfactory, but standards attained were below average

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

235. **Music** was not a focus subject, but was sampled during the inspection. Standards over three years have been average and students' achievement satisfactory. Only a small number of students study music at AS and A-level but the introduction of the music technology course is increasing the popularity of the course. Pupils value the developing link with another local school and the opportunity to work in larger groups. Teaching and management of sixth form music are satisfactory.

236. Results in **theatre studies** have been below average, but as numbers of students taking the course have been under five over the last three years, a comparison of data to national figures is invalid. New links with a neighbouring school to make a viable group in the sixth form have yet to make a significant impact on standards attained.

### **Art**

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

#### **Strengths**

- Leadership, expertise and enthusiasm of staff, leading to good teaching.

- Students receive good individual help.
- The popularity of the AS- and A-level art course, and students' positive attitudes.

#### Areas for improvement

- Results at the higher grades.
- Opportunities for independent study, or for drawing and painting on a large scale, because they have no designated learning area for art outside lessons.
- The time for students to experiment, evaluate and reflect critically on their work.
- Resources to extend the quality of research and visits to galleries.

237. In recent years, A-level results have consistently been at, or above, national averages, with a high proportion of students gaining A to E grades. In 2000, only a few students took A-level under the previous A-level regulations and results were low. Numbers and standards were higher for AS-level in 2001. Numbers of students doubled for the new course, with 82 per cent achieving A to E grades, of whom 36 per cent gained the higher grades. This represents good achievement, since the students' results in GCSE were broadly average. There are no significant differences in attainment between male and female students.

238. The work of students is of average standard and their achievement is satisfactory. Numbers have been maintained for AS Level and all the students from the 2001 AS Level group have continued on the A2 course. In Year 12, students sustain much of their interest and skill from their GCSE work, working from direct observation and developing the skills of printmaking and painting through a structured and systematic approach. In Year 13, higher attaining students show an adventurous and sophisticated understanding of what is needed in purposeful preparatory studies. The majority demonstrate a growing understanding of technical knowledge and skill in drawing and painting though some average and lower-attaining students display weaknesses in the drawing aspects of the course. Year 13 students experiment with paint to build tonal effects and use artists' techniques, for example, to show how movement can be represented on a two-dimensional surface. Work in sketchbooks shows that good enquiry methods have been established for the majority of students and a wide range of materials and approaches is used to good effect, such as, the weaving of photographic images and grasses to explore expressive elements of the city. Students' preliminary sketches show a good understanding of design principles and they know how to create evocative images. Lower-attaining students know their strengths, but are less certain about how to make connections between their own work and that of other artists to express a personal view in their studies. Students are very keen to learn and many are able to work independently. However, this is restricted somewhat because they have no designated area in art to continue study outside the single period lesson.

239. The teaching observed was good. Teachers' expectations are high and relationships are very good, which helps to stimulate and motivate students through the two-year course. No students have given up the current course. Teachers show a good knowledge of individual students' strengths and weaknesses and plan activities geared to their individual needs. Marking and assessment are appropriate. However, targets to complete work at home lack rigour for average and lower-attaining students. Some good quality visual resources, including digital and imaging equipment, are used in the teaching of expressive, thematic and critical and contextual studies. Teachers have good knowledge, expertise and technical skill for working on A-level courses and have gained useful experience in the new AS course. A visit to the Tate Modern has extended students' knowledge of art and design, including aspects of contemporary practice, but staff have missed some opportunities to build on these experiences. Teachers' use of time at the beginning and end of lessons to raise group perception of how to move ideas forward and evaluate what students have accomplished is not always systematic.

240. The department is well led, with good liaison between the two key teachers. The courses match students' aspirations and build well upon student's achievements in the AS course. AS and A2 courses are taught separately and, while visual stimulation for developing printmaking is very good, facilities for sixth form display in mainstream classrooms are limited. Assessment procedures are good and are well linked to A-level course criteria, with clear guidance for students on self-evaluation. Accommodation for sixth form access outside timetabled lesson time for work to be continued is unsatisfactory and

additional funding for learning resources for A-level students is inadequate. Single periods of teaching have an unfavourable impact on continuity and contribute to a restraint on students' attainment in the higher grades. Improvement since the last inspection is satisfactory, with higher numbers now taking the courses.

## HUMANITIES

### Geography

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

#### Strengths

- Teachers' good knowledge of their students, and very good relationships.
- Teachers' very good subject knowledge.
- The opportunities provided for students to apply their learning through fieldwork.

#### Areas for improvement

- Students' lack of the skills needed for independent learning
- The low AS and A-levels results.
- The match of work to some students' capabilities.

241. Over recent years students' results have been below the national average. In 2000, a much smaller proportion of A-level students achieved the higher grades, A and B, than is the case nationally. However, the proportion of students achieving grades in the range A to E, was in line with the national average. In the AS level examinations, all students gained at least an E grade, higher than the national average, but no student gained a grade in the range A to B. This represents satisfactory achievement overall, given the standards of students when they enter the sixth form.

242. The work seen in lessons and in students' folders confirms this. The overall quality of students, oral and written work is below the level expected at this stage. Their achievement in relation to their GCSE grades is satisfactory. Students have been well prepared in basic subject skills, for example map-work and graphicacy, and are able to apply these to good effect at this level. They have a sound factual knowledge and use terms appropriately and with accuracy. However, their appreciation of process and the interrelationships between human and physical aspects are less well developed. For example, the essays of Year 13 students lacked detail and examples were not sufficiently developed to illustrate the impact of natural events on the local population. Only in a very few cases was the student able to move from the listing of information to the analysis necessary to draw effective conclusions. Students' research skills are generally below an appropriate level for advanced study.

243. In lessons, the majority of pupils work conscientiously but with little urgency. In a Year 13 lesson, where pupils worked independently to research aspects of glacial deposition, the introductory task took them almost twice as long as expected. As a result the pace of the lesson slowed, the learning objectives were not achieved in full and the work produced was below the level expected. The majority of students experience difficulties in coping with independent learning as when they enter the sixth form they have been given insufficient opportunities to practise the necessary skills. This was evident in a Year 12 lesson where students were set a challenging task based on a simulated volcanic eruption. The higher-attaining students made good progress and responded to the challenge. Other students were hesitant, clearly lacking confidence and needing constant reassurance from the teacher. Overall, students are very satisfied with the courses and enjoy many of the learning experiences provided.

244. Teaching is satisfactory overall. It is carefully planned and learning objectives are made clear to the students. Teachers' subject knowledge is good and they have adapted quickly to the changed demands of the revised examinations. Students are motivated by the very enthusiastic exposition, rich in examples and supported with a good range of resources. In the three lessons observed, the high expectations of the teachers, in terms of pace and challenge, were not fully realised as much of the work was too demanding for a significant number of the students. Students are encouraged to make full use of their ICT skills and have access to stations in the sixth form study area. The very good promotion of students' numerical skills is continued at this stage.

245. The marking of students' work is very good and contains detailed advice to help students see how they can improve. Students' academic performance is monitored effectively and reliable data is used to set targets that are regularly reviewed to provide the department with a clear view of their progress.

246. The geography department is managed satisfactorily. The two specialist teachers are enthusiastic and committed to improvement. They contribute a good blend of experience and ideas that could be exploited further, for example, the teaching and learning are not evaluated with sufficient rigour and the teachers should work together to share good practice more effectively. The courses offered might be reviewed in terms of their appropriateness for the students choosing this subject.

## History

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

### Strengths

- Teachers' very good subject knowledge leads to challenging and focused teaching
- Very good relationships between teachers and students gives students confidence in their opinions
- Good attainment, especially in the 2001 AS levels

### Areas for improvement

- Involvement of students in more active learning process through debate, argument and learning from each other
- Supplement teaching with more participation in outside events
- Opportunities to use ICT.

247. The results of the small cohort A-level entries in 2000 were above national average, a standard sustained over recent years and since the last inspection. The results for 2001 were also above national expectations, as was students' attainment in the 2001 AS level examinations. Students make good progress over time.

248. Standards of work of current students are above average. The current Year 13 students are building on their achievements of last year's AS study. They confidently drew on past learning about parliamentary democracy and representation. All students could locate their study of the struggle for women's suffrage within complex long-term developments as well as the short-term effects of war and women's activism. Higher-attaining students justified their selections of significant forces for change and were able to provide measured explanations for placing one cause above another in importance.

249. Although only a short time into their course, pupils in Year 12 were achieving well in relation to their prior attainment. In a lesson on the rise of Nazism, they drew on past learning to place in context their analysis of propaganda materials used by the Nazis. All could make suggestions as to who the intended audience might be and why. Higher-attaining students provided complex responses, demonstrating not only good knowledge of the core beliefs of National Socialism but also what social and economic circumstances led particular groups to support such a cause.

250. Overall, teaching is good. Teachers' confidence in their subject and syllabus knowledge allows teachers to structure and vary learning activities to promote good learning. For example, Year 13 students were drawn step by step by the teacher into a complex network of causal factors for women's suffrage, enabling them to build on past learning and develop their skills of evaluation. The head of



department has planned for students to become involved in sixth form history seminars. He is also aware of the need for more extensive use of computers within the department.

251. The department is well managed. Students' success in the 2001 examinations shows the teachers' success in applying their considerable experience to new demands. The new head of department has identified existing strengths, and also opportunities to build on these by expanding the range of experiences students encounter in their A-level studies.

## Sociology

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

### Strengths

- Students in Year 12 show a lively interest in the subject.

### Areas for development.

- Establish clear responsibility for the subject
- Improve guidance for students on sources for research data, including the use of ICT.
- Consolidate learning and promote critical thinking by involving students more in the learning process through debate and argument.

252. AS-level results in 2001 were below the national average. The course was introduced in 2000. Standards of work of the students now in Year 12 are below course expectations. For example, in a lesson on sub-cultures, Year 13 students showed a lack of knowledge of basic terms and concepts and how to apply them to particular situations. The samples of students' work showed that they write competently about key features, such as of pluralistic societies, but have difficulty with higher-level tasks such as evaluating research findings. Overall, students' achievement is unsatisfactory.

253. Year 12 students' achievement is, however, satisfactory in relation to their attainment at the start of the course. In a lesson on the under-achievements of boys in school, all pupils enthusiastically offered explanations gleaned from past learning and statistical information. They moved on to identify their suggestions within two original sources presented by the teacher. Higher-attaining pupils were able to move on from identifying these common-sense explanations to recognise some as sweeping generalisations. Referring these responses back to their recent considerations of the impact of social class on school attitudes and performance, they noted that explanations might have to be more complex. In discussion, they recognised that the aim and value of sociological research is to test such explanations and theories in grounded and plausible research findings. Meanwhile, other pupils acquired information from press articles about practical strategies related to this identified problem. This class was making a sound start to their studies, ready to begin considerations of the nature of research and how to test for reliability and validity.

254. The quality of teaching observed during the inspection was satisfactory overall and occasionally good. However, the evidence of the work samples and the 2001 AS-level results showed that over time the teaching of sociology is unsatisfactory. Teaching was good when the teacher structured and focused the lesson around a clear objective, for example exploring 'gender differences in education'. Through personal experience, the students suggested initial hypotheses, and then progressively built up understanding through reference to published articles. Higher-attaining students were beginning to ask critical questions and draw on previous learning, for example on the effects of social class. However, Year 13 pupils prepared presentations for reading to the class, which were done confidently but were essentially little more than notes that were read aloud. These readings did not develop into the

challenging debate or questioning between students, which is expected by Year 13. As a result, students do not make the hoped-for progress. Students are not accustomed to locating and testing new theories within conventional perspectives that they have studied, and submitting them to critical scrutiny.

255. No teacher has a formal responsibility for managing sociology. The lack of experienced teachers of sixth form sociology, to plan how to meet the challenges of the new syllabuses, substantially explains the relatively poor showing of sociology in the examinations in 2001. However, the students who have opted to study sociology show considerable interest in it, and the school has plans for improving the management of the subject.

## ENGLISH, LANGUAGES AND COMMUNICATION

### English

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

#### Strengths

- Good teaching geared to individual students' needs.
- Teachers' good subject knowledge.
- Very good relationships between teachers and students.

#### Areas for improvement

- Sixth form library accommodation and stock, which is insufficient to support wider reading and extend independent learning.

256. Results in A-level English literature have fluctuated over the last three years, but in 2001 were in line with the national average. In the first year of AS-level, the results from Year 12 were below the national average. However, they were in line with what students with similar GCSE results gained. English is the most popular subject in the sixth form. Most of those who took the AS-level course in Year 12 are now continuing into the second year of A-level. The number of students taking this course has increased from eight in 1999 to twenty-one in the current Year 13.

257. Work seen in lessons and students' files shows that standards are rising, particularly for the average-attaining students with grade C and D targets. Overall, standards of current work are average. Male and female students do equally well in their close reading of texts, and show a good understanding of literary form and structure. Higher-attaining students are articulate and self-confident when answering questions and presenting their views, though some students are reluctant to commit themselves to individual interpretations. In Year 13, students contributed very well to a discussion of 'The Dubliners', each taking a role of a character in the stories. They had prepared thoughtfully and the task was particularly well managed by the teacher so that every student at some point took a lead and others remained active. Written work is coherently organised, and that of the higher-attainers is incisive and accurate. Students use the study of professional writers effectively to enhance their own writing. Year 12 students, in their analysis of performing Shakespeare made good use of theatre programmes from a production of 'Henry V'. Students in Year 13 examined critical essays on Dublin by Anthony Burgess and Frank O'Connor to understand the Irish background of James Joyce. However, the quality of students' written work varies considerably, with some students insecure in their expression and making basic errors. Students achieve well during Years 12 and 13, but some must make a big jump in the more advanced demands of intellectual skill and knowledge. Students in Year 12 approaching AS-level with average or lower attainment at GCSE experience literacy difficulties and struggle with the extended writing requirements.

258. Students' attitudes to the subject are very good. They work well together, show a strong sense of purpose and a respect for the teachers. Less successful is their independent reading around a topic. They research material collected from the Internet, but lack good resources in the main-school library.

259. The quality of teaching in the sixth form is good, often very good. Teachers have a very good knowledge of their subject, which enables them to turn to positive use the unexpected questions. They know their students well, have consistently good relations and are especially adept at guiding and supporting those students who need extra help. Students know how well they are doing from the thorough marking by the teachers and the regular assessment of work against examination criteria. Many extra-curricular visits, for example to the theatre and trips to Dublin and the Bronte country in Yorkshire, help to extend students' interest and maintain good achievement through Year 12 and 13.

260. The management of English in the sixth form is very good. There is a strong commitment to succeed, to improve and to help students starting from widely different levels to gain from and enjoy their study of literature. A new media studies course has made a successful start, is popular and is developing well in its second year. With a new team of teachers since the last inspection, improvement in English has been very good. The pace is now swift, oral work is challenging and teaching is geared to the individual learners' needs.

## French

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

### Strengths

- Excellent teaching
- Teachers' subject knowledge and linguistic skills are excellent

### Area for development

- Numbers of students taking French and Russian in the sixth form.

261. At the time of the inspection only one student was studying French in the sixth form, in Year 13. Over recent years all students entered for French and Russian have passed A-level. About half usually gain the higher grades. The numbers entered are too small, however, to enable valid national comparisons. Evidence from work seen during the inspection and in course work files shows that excellent standards are achieved in all four skills. Comprehension skills are very well developed. The student can understand the gist and extract details from a wide range of written and spoken texts and cope well with lessons conducted entirely in French. A wide variety of written work is produced, ranging from notes and exercises to extended projects and presentations. Writing is very accurate and contains rich vocabulary and expressions and a good range of structures, which indicates a very good knowledge of grammar. Progress and achievement are excellent. New vocabulary and new structures are learned quickly and efficiently. Use is made of dictionaries to check meanings and develop good reading and listening skills. Language patterns are quickly recognised and structures are manipulated with ease. Opinions are expressed with confidence orally and in writing.

262. The sixth form teaching in French is excellent and the subject is well led. Lessons are well prepared and have clear and appropriate aims. The excellent strategies for promoting reading and listening skills and developing speaking skills using skilful guided questions and interesting cues and prompts. Lessons are conducted entirely in French, which greatly enhances aural comprehension and oral production. Very good use is made of a range of authentic listening and reading resources. The contribution of the French 'assistante' ensures that speaking and listening competences are fully developed.